

SOCIETY SMALL TALK.

SOCIETY SMALL TALK

OR

WHAT TO SAY AND WHEN TO SAY IT

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“MANNERS AND TONE OF GOOD SOCIETY.”



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P R E F A C E.

THE aim of this little work is to place before the public in a light, bright, sketchy manner, suggestions for making Society Small-Talk. Hints have therefore been given in these pages as to What should be said under certain circumstances, and What should not be said, and how that in making agreeable small-talk it is not necessary to strain after originality, but rather to treat an every-day topic in such a way that original ideas, original remarks, and therefore original small-talk must sooner or later be evolved from it. This has been illustrated as far as possible by fragmentary dialogues, treating of a variety

of subjects applicable to the situation of the moment.

To those who are silent when in society, not because they consider that “though speech is silver, silence is golden,” but because they have no ready change in the way of “silver” at command, the present work will, it is hoped, commend itself, and be of some little service at all society gatherings and in general society.

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SOCIETY SMALL TALK.

CHAPTER I.

THE ART OF SMALL TALK.

AGREEABLE "Small Talk," the current coin of society, is the key as it were to all pleasant intimacies and acquaintanceships, although a vast difference exists between a brilliant conversationalist and an agreeable person. The one possesses wit, humour, repartee, a ready flow of ideas, a good memory, great powers of rhetoric—in fact, versatile talent, if not exactly genius; while the other brings into society only an average amount of intelligence, tact, good-humour, and geniality, combined with a ready facility of expression and an adaptability of manner; and although but few are endowed with the gifts which distinguish the one, it is within the capacity of all to acquire the graces of the other.

It is a very general lament amongst people well educated, but upon whom Nature has not conferred any choice gifts of mind—in other words, people

whom it would be idle to call clever—that they never know what to say, or “that they could have got on so much better with So-and-so if they had only known what to talk about,” or “that So-and-so appeared to be a very good fellow, but they could not get on with him somehow.” The not knowing what to talk about is the secret of why so many people in society appear to be dull, stupid, and commonplace; they probably merit neither of these uncomplimentary adjectives, and would very much object to their being applied to them.

The art of making a continuous flow of really agreeable, pleasant “small talk” is not to be overestimated, and those who are masters of this art stand upon a vantage ground which is of real service to them at every phase of their social career.

By “small talk” is meant not merely agreeable nothings, but the interchange of civilities, urbanities, thoughts and ideas on general subjects, all of which form the basis of conversation between acquaintances, and indeed of all conversation which does not partake of either an intimate or private character, or of the nature of an important communication, but which simply takes place between persons meeting in society, and who have no common bond of union beyond the interest of the moment. There are many things which tend to form a bond of union between strangers meeting even for the first time; mutual friends are a common bond of union between both men and

women—and with men, mutual professions, and mutual pursuits, are a never failing bond of union. Men, as a rule, are quick to discover any mutual bond of interest between each other, while women on the contrary are comparatively slow at discovering a mutual bond, unless it were one not easily to be overlooked.

Remarks or observations of whatever character cannot be looked upon as legitimate small talk when they are made with a purpose, and convey a statement, and thus have an end and aim of their own; small talk being actually and entirely conversation created apropos of the moment, with no other ulterior motive than that of its being agreeable small talk, and of evoking a corresponding degree of agreeability.

If there were any elementary knowledge to be acquired in the art of making small talk, it would probably be the considering in the first place what subject would most likely prove agreeable to the individual with whom one was about to converse; this might be arrived at by the further considering that individual's sex, age, social position, known proclivities, and pursuits; and although the proclivities and pursuits which distinguish her, or him, may not be known to a passing acquaintance, yet the sex, age, and social position of a person are at all times sufficient indications on which to form an accurate idea

as to the subject of conversation most likely to be of interest for the time being.

A likely subject of conversation having been thus arrived at, the next consideration is how it should be handled, or how it might best be introduced. To an intelligent mind three or four ideas would probably suggest themselves, all equally apropos of the occasion. These additional ideas should be looked upon as a reserve force, to be called up at any moment in the event of the first conversational effort falling rather flat, or having become speedily exhausted through the unskilful manner in which it was originated; or supposing the contrary to be the case, and the first start to have been a happy one, then by a few judicious remarks the conversation could be led into the direction in which these ideas, either singly, collectively, or consecutively, might be brought into play; and thus the ball of conversation would be briskly kept up, and those dead locks in conversation, known as awkward pauses, avoided. When a subject of conversation is allowed to die out of itself, or to exhaust itself, then a complete silence must ensue, unless out of the ashes of the one subject a new topic should arise, or by the conversation being turned into one or other of those channels which have been already alluded to, viz., the "reserve forces."

Having thus acquired possession of an idea, the

little ship should not be abruptly launched into deep waters, but should be first permitted to glide gently and smoothly into the shallows; that is to say, the conversation should not be commenced by broadly and roundly stating a fact, or didactically expressing an opinion, as the subject would be thus virtually or summarily disposed of, or perhaps be met with a “Really” or “Indeed,” or some equally brief monosyllabic reply; as if an opposite opinion were held by the person to whom the remark were addressed, he might not if a stranger care to express it in the form of a direct contradiction, or actual dissent; on the other hand, to glide imperceptibly into conversation is the object to be attained. To be desirous, as it were, of learning and of hearing the opinions and ideas of others, is a far surer way of drawing them into conversation, and of giving scope for the exercise of their conversational powers, and at the same time of affording room for the display of one’s own resources, than by being egotistically and curtly explicit as to one’s own opinions and convictions.

Again, to evince a kindly interest in an individual with whom one is conversing, is both flattering and agreeable, while to put home questions or questions of a wholly personal nature—the evidence either of an idle curiosity or utter thoughtlessness—is the reverse of flattering, and is as illbred in the one as it is disagreeable to the other. A brusque, abrupt, jerky

manner of speaking is often the result of nervousness and self-consciousness, and imbues the most innocent remark with a catechising tone, creating a most unfavourable impression upon the mind or susceptibilities of the person thus addressed.

Mental exertion is as necessary in the art of conversing as in the exercise or practice of any other art : this fact is too much lost sight of, and many are too apt to imagine that without the smallest effort or exertion a sudden rush of brilliant ideas floods the soul of the agreeable conversationalist, and envy his wonderful and superior gifts, never attributing these gifts to the natural exercise of an average intelligence. The vapid vacant manner common to many who appear vainly seeking to derive inspiration from the inanimate objects which surround them, precludes the possibility of holding any conversation with them beyond the merest trivialities ; they answer "Yes," and they answer "No;" beyond this they cannot go, and people, with a shrug, say of them, "A pretty woman, but nothing in her," or, "A good-looking man, but such a stick!"

Next to the good talker ranks the good listener, and the good listener is always voted a most agreeable person ; a good listener appears to be keenly interested in the conversation addressed to him, and with great tact and judgment is able to put in just at the right moment the right remark, calculated to assist and to

sustain the conversation, but great discretion is needed in not interrupting a flow of ideas or a graphic narration by an ill-timed observation or an equally inappropriate question.

It is not seldom that a good listener also possesses considerable conversational powers, the mental exertions required of both listener and talker being equal if not synonymous—the qualities of the one being also the qualities of the other.

A mediocre egotistical talker proves as a rule but a bad listener, his egotism asserts itself at every turn of the conversation. Let him but have half an idea on the subject in hand, than he hastens to unfold it regardless of how the interruption will be received; but when “a good listener” has an idea worth the hearing he reserves it until a break in the conversation admits of his giving it utterance; impulsive people are too often apt to offer these inopportune interruptions, rather perhaps from mere thoughtlessness than from egotism or self-importance.

“Voice” and “manner” are of paramount importance in the art of conversing. It is a very erroneous idea to suppose that men or women in “fashionable society,” or what is termed the “best society,” or “good society,” speak with a lisp or a languid drawl, or with any mannerism whatever. Well-bred people speak in a natural and unaffected manner, the cadence of the voice being low and the

intonation thoroughly distinct, each syllable of each word being clearly pronounced, but without pedantry or exaggeration.

The modulation of the tones of the voice is also a great point with the well-educated; and this it is which gives to the voice the slow, measured ring which the uninitiated endeavour to imitate by the assuming an affected drawl, or by speaking in deep and guttural accents, as foreign to the genuine voice of the well-bred man or woman as is the dialect of a Lancashire operative. When ladies speak in deep contralto tones it is because Nature has endowed them with deep contralto voices, and not with an idea of assuming tones other than their natural ones.

The voice is one of the best and truest indications of education and refinement, and betrays the absence of these qualities with almost painful intensity.

Those who possess unrefined or common voices, should, on becoming aware of the fact—and there is no surer way of gaining this knowledge than by comparing the tones of their own uncultivated voices with the tones of more refined ones—endeavour to remedy this defect by carefully *educating* their voices by speaking slowly, clearly, and distinctly, and by pitching the voice in a low key, chest notes are an advantage to persons having “shril” voices if they can be made use of without gruffness; thus, with a

due regard to accentuation, modulation, and pronunciation, a very fair result may be achieved.

The common error with the many is their rapid or, so to say, slovenly manner of speaking; the slurring over of the final syllables, the dropping the voice before the words have been but half-uttered, and the running a string of words together with hurried ungraceful accents, too often starting with a jerk and concluding with a rush.

CHAPTER II.

TWENTY MINUTES TALK AT MORNING CALLS.

AT "Morning Calls," those not well-acquainted, or who are on ceremony with each other, having but little in common, and not exactly sure of their ground, require as it were quite a fund of small talk to carry them pleasantly and easily through an interview or *tête-à-tête*. But between people thoroughly intimate, moving in the same sphere, and having a circle of mutual friends, pleasant friendly chat, agreeable conversation, or a general interchange of ideas on foreign and domestic matters, supersede small talk, rendering them independent of its friendly aid.

To possess a good flow of small talk, or rather to have the power of making it readily *apropos* to the occasion, is a faculty that but few are endowed with, taking society in the aggregate.

A slight acquaintance is not necessarily the drawback to making small talk, as might be supposed; for persons whose acquaintanceship is of long standing often experience as much difficulty in making

themselves agreeable to, or in other words "getting on with" each other, as if their acquaintance were but a day old. Every one knows this class of person, and every one has met them; they have no ready flow of ideas, and no readiness of speech at command; and when an ordinary idea does occur to them, they hasten to deliver it with inordinate eagerness, ungracefully and ungrammatically; these abrupt utterances are usually followed by a collapse, as if the remark thus jerked out happens to fall flat through being ill-timed, or rather from being beside the question, it is either met by a little cold unsympathetic "Oh," or calls forth a slightly sarcastic rejoinder; and either of these modes of receiving the well-meant conversational effort is equally detrimental to further advances of this nature.

In conversing with new acquaintances a certain amount of shyness and reserve is often perceptible in the manner of persons who are not naturally reserved, and who, not quite sure of the line they ought to take with respect to the proclivities and ideas of a new acquaintance, feel a reluctance in starting any but the most commonplace topics, and thus appear to be but very commonplace people. It is the facility of making small talk that enables a person to set this natural reserve on one side, and which gives, as it were, the key of the situation to its fortunate possessor.

“Morning Calls” are a great test of individual capabilities for making small talk, as a morning call, signifies neither more nor less than a quarter of an hour’s conversation with the person called upon ; and a *mauvais quart d’heure* it is to those who are at a loss what to say or what to talk about, while to those proficient in the agreeable art of small talk, morning calls are among the pleasantest of social duties, when the conventional quarter of an hour of a conventional morning call is lengthened out into half an hour’s easy and delightful talk, chat, or conversation, as the case may be.

The etiquette of morning calls is fully described in a former work ;* thus when the call is made, and the visitor is ushered into the drawing-room, and the hostess has risen to shake hands, the usual salutation would be, “How do you do ?” The abbreviation of “How do you do ?” into “Howdy do ?” is supposed by some to be the height of good manners, whereas it sounds affected, and is rather in bad taste than not. Although “How do you do ?” when uttered quickly takes the sound of “How d’ye do ?” the salutation of “How do you do ?” should simply be regarded as a salutation only, and not as a personal inquiry after the health of the individual to whom it is addressed ; and this formula of “How do you do ?” should be answered with the like formula of

* “The Manners and Tone of Good Society.”

“How do you do?” It is actually as much a simultaneous salutation as is a bow, and is simultaneously expressed; to answer this greeting of “How do you do?” with “Pretty well, thank you,” or “I have not been very well lately,” or “Quite well, thank you, I hope you are quite well,” or the like references to health, would be trite, tiresome, and out of place. When the health of either visitor or hostess is discussed, inquired after, or sympathised with, it would not be referred to on the first entrance of the visitor, but later on when the ladies were seated; the expression of “How do you do?” should be uttered lightly and smoothly, neither of the words being in any way accented.

It is not considered in good taste for ladies, when addressing each other, to add their surnames to the salutation of “How do you do?” unless several persons were present, when it might be expedient to do so, or in the case of a visitor being a comparative stranger to the hostess, when it would be correct although ceremonious to do so, and then only on the visitor’s first arrival, but in *tête-à-tête* conversations it is not usual for persons to address each other by their surnames, the personal pronoun “You” being all-sufficient for the occasion. When several people are conversing together, it is often necessary for ladies to address each other by their surnames—in the case, for instance, of two ladies wishing to draw a third

into conversation, or in the case of one lady wishing to address her friend or acquaintance at some little distance from her; but for two ladies to ring the changes on each other's names, or for one lady to reiterate the name of the person with whom she is conversing, thus: "May I give you some tea, Mrs. A.?"—"No, thank you, Mrs. B." "How is your little girl, Mrs. A.?"—"Very well, thank you, Mrs. B., I hope your children are quite well?"—would be to remind one of the sort of conversation one hears between the small Norfolk farmers, who address each other after this fashion: "Good morning, Mr. B., and pray how do Mr. B. do this morning?"—"Pretty well, I thankye, sir, and pray how do Mr. C. do this morning?"

On the hostess and visitor being seated at a morning call, they would, if not particularly intimate, have recourse to the adventitious aid of "small talk."

The weather is a never failing topic to the unimaginative, but this is a weak resource after all, and is very speedily exhausted. Wet weather admits of a few more remarks being extracted therefrom than does fine weather. Wet days and cold winds can be deplored and regretted, but remarks on fine weather admit of little but assent.

"What a lovely day it is!"

"Yes, it is very fine, quite like summer."

"It was very fine yesterday."

“Yes, it was, but the wind was rather cold, I thought.”

The topic of fine weather can but begin and end in this wise. The topic of bad weather carries the conversation but very little further; and those depending upon this frail conversational bark find themselves very soon stranded.

“How dreadfully wet it has been this week!”

“Yes, I think it has rained nearly every day.”

“We had a very heavy storm of rain this morning, but it seems to have cleared up now.”

“Yes; but I should not be surprised if we were to have more rain before night.”

The variability of the English climate naturally suggests a few passing remarks, but remarks of this nature are not sufficiently important or interesting to warrant their forming the first, and with some people, the *only* subject of conversation.

Small talk to be agreeable should not partake of the nature of a catechism, meaning a mere string of questions—questions not led up to or in any way originated or evolved from the foregoing conversation, but put abruptly and apropos of nothing. There are several topics that are handled in this uncomfortable manner by certain commonplace people, until these commonplace questions are anticipated almost before they are uttered, such as:—

“Have you been to the Academy?” “Have you

been to the opera?" "Have you heard —?"—mentioning some new *prima donna*. "Have you seen —?"—meaning some new popular piece. "Have you read —?"—referring to some new popular novel.

These and similar subjects are very suitable ones upon which to construct light small talk, but they should be introduced and welded into the chain of talk rather than be treated interrogatively, and should be given rather as a personal experience, combined with an apparent wish to gather an expression of opinion from the person to whom the remarks are addressed. This mode of treating these ordinary subjects divests them slightly of the commonplaceness with which they are too often broached. Commonplace people greatly try the patience of their friends by their trite commonplaces respecting the opera and the artistes, apparently oblivious of the fact that the daily newspapers contain ample criticisms on the merits and demerits of the various artistes. These observations apply solely to those mediocre people who are thoroughly incompetent to form any opinion on the matter, being wanting alike in talent, education, and intellect, and these are precisely the people who step in where "angels fear to tread," and who thrust their inane remarks upon those who are far more capable of forming a correct judgment. When musical events or artistic or literary points are discussed or alluded

to by talented and gifted people, the contrary is the case, and their opinions are sought for and appreciated.

After the first preliminaries of welcoming a visitor at a morning call are over, the ball of small talk would be set rolling in this wise, premising that the ladies are new acquaintances rather than intimate friends. The hostess would probably say, "How long have you been in town?" or "When did you come up?" or "I heard you were in town from the A.'s, but they did not say where you were staying. I am so glad you came to see me," or "The A.'s told me you were in town, and I was coming to see you one day this week."

These remarks would be addressed under different circumstances to ladies arriving in town from the country. To ladies resident in town, the one receiving the call would perhaps say (to a new acquaintance with whom she had but little in common, or as has been said, with whom she was not quite sure of her ground), "We have been away lately, and have only just come back to town," or "We have been in town all the winter," or "We have been having our house re-decorated since you were here, and the workmen are hardly out of it yet, as you see."

A lady by thus mentioning her own movements or arrangements, or by referring to any matter connected with herself and family if not of too private a nature,

gives a lead or opening to her visitor, and affords an opportunity for her to take up the thread of the discourse, and to carry it into wider channels, far beyond the range of the operas, the theatres, or the weather. And in proportion as the conversation diverges into friendly or domestic talk, so do the two ladies become more at ease with each other, gaining in a short time a clear insight into each other's character and pursuits.

In answer to a remark such as "We have been away lately, and have only just come back to town," a visitor would probably reply, "Have you been at your place? I suppose the country is looking very lovely just now," or "Have you been abroad then?" or "Indeed, where have you been staying?" A short reply of this nature would give an opportunity of very much being said. The beauties of the country could be or would be descanted upon, the neighbourhood would be casually mentioned, and the neighbours as casually referred to.

If the winter had been passed abroad, there would at once be a wide field offered for conversation, which an intelligent visitor would make the most of by drawing forth descriptions of the tour, and the amusements and interests of the place by a few judicious observations in this wise; supposing that the sojourn had been at Nice, Paris, or Cairo, and the visitor has been at neither of these places of resort, she must

draw upon her memory and endeavour to recollect something she has heard respecting the most salient features of either place for the purpose of keeping up the conversation, and of calling forth details that her hostess is so able and so willing to furnish. And if, on the contrary, she were herself personally acquainted with the foreign town or city named, whatever had most pleased and interested herself would be the points to bring forward, with the view of eliciting the opinions of the lady with whom she was conversing.

The query of "Where have you been staying?" would offer an opportunity for much information and explanation, the small talk taking some such line as this :

"We have been spending the winter at Brighton. I always think it is a good plan to go to the sea in November; town is so dreary then, and the sunny mornings at the sea are so invigorating and cheering."

"Yes, I should think it was very enjoyable at the sea in the autumn; the fall of the leaf is so depressing in the country, one realises the approach of winter so painfully. But we hardly ever leave home then, as my husband is so devoted to hunting, and we generally have people staying with us in November."

Such a lead as this would carry on both ladies for a good quarter of an hour at least, both pleasantly and agreeably.

To touch on the actual topics of the hour demands both tact and cleverness, and a topic of ordinary interest that has become common property through the medium of the morning papers or the society journals should never be introduced as an item of original news. Many people contract the habit of making small talk out of the intelligence supplied by the morning papers, slightly forgetful of the fact that this mine of information is open to all. This class of small talk is peculiarly irritating to a well-informed listener. When the public news of the day is important enough to be referred to, it should be brought forward as "public news" only, for discussion or argument, or as a matter of general interest, surprise, or regret.

If "tea" was brought in during the visit, the hostess would probably say, "May I give you some tea?" or "Will you have some tea?" or "The tea is here, may I give you some?" or "You will have some tea, will you not?" But she would not say, "Will you allow me to offer you a cup of tea?" or "Will you take a cup of tea?" Drinking tea or not at a morning call is so thoroughly immaterial and unimportant a matter that no persuasion should be employed in offering it, and if visitors decline it, it is unnecessary to induce them to alter their minds.

When one or two callers are present, unacquainted

with each other and but slightly acquainted with the hostess, if not intending to make a formal introduction she would endeavour to render the conversation general, incidentally mentioning the names of the callers, that each might become aware of the identity of the other; a hint, a suggestion, or an expression dropped from either of the ladies would, in the hands of a clever woman, be all-sufficient for the basis of small talk.

Even between the merest acquaintances some slight fact must be known which would serve as an opening for the making of small talk, and the opening thus given would admit of a higher flight being taken than the trivial fact which had given rise to the conversation; for instance, a lady calling would perhaps observe, "I was so sorry I was out when you called, one always misses those whom one most wishes to see—at least, I generally find it so." To which the hostess might reply,—

"Indeed, yes. Chance rarely if ever, stands one's friend, and yet it is curious how sometimes chance brings about the very thing one has been vainly endeavouring to compass."

"Are you a believer in 'fate' or 'chance,' or whatever it may be, Mrs. A.? or do you think that every one is master of his own fate, and that there is no such thing as 'chance'?"

"I don't think I am—it seems to me that every-

thing that is to happen, will happen, and that no efforts of ours can control or avert the inevitable—I mean with regard to the higher and more important events of one's life."

To which the hostess might say, "You are quite a fatalist; do you not agree with me, Mrs. B.? and have you not seen instances where a quarter of an hour either way has altered the whole tenor of a person's life?"

To which Mrs. B. might reply, "Well, I do rather agree with you to a certain extent; 'chance' has certainly much to do with the incidents of every-day life; and, after all, one's life is made up of little things rather than of great turning points."

Then the hostess might say, on the entrance of her husband, "We were talking about 'chance.' "

To which the husband might gallantly remark, "Well, it is a lucky chance that has brought me home in time to hear the opinions of these two fair ladies on the subject."

Small talk of the character of the foregoing can easily be evolved from the most random remark, and it is precisely this class of small talk in which those who are strangers to each other can so easily take part, and which can be directed into more elevating channels than can be the mere fashionable gossip of the hour; it has also this advantage over fashionable gossip, in so far that it is not necessary that people should move

in the same set to understand the drift of the talk, whereas fashionable small talk relating exclusively to the movements of personal acquaintances causes what should be a conversation *à trois* to become a dialogue *à deux* in this wise,—

“What lovely diamonds Mrs. C. wore last night, and how well everything was done!”

“Yes; but we left rather early. Do you know who that woman was with the black pearls?—every one was asking who she was.”

“Oh, you mean the Russian beauty, Countess —; one meets her everywhere—have you met her, Mrs. D.?”

To which Mrs. D., not, perhaps, moving in the set in which the Russian countess was shining, would answer rather stiffly that she had *not* met her. The same lady wishing good-naturedly to include her in the conversation would further remark,—

“What a crush it was at Lady’s E.’s on Tuesday—you know the E.’s, I think?”

“No, I don’t know them.”

“Oh, really, I thought you did perhaps;” and then the attempts at drawing Mrs. D. into conversation would cease, and the dialogue between the two other ladies would be resumed from this point.

“Have you heard that the pretty Miss H., Lady Emily’s daughter, is engaged to—— I forget his name?”

"Oh, yes; I know—Captain M.; but he has no money. I wonder they allow it."

"Are you asked to the R.'s ball?"

"Yes, I am; but I don't think I shall go—one meets such odd people there."

Mrs. D. having nothing in common with the subject in hand, through being unacquainted with the people referred to, would rise to take her leave after paying the shortest possible call.

Leave-taking at morning calls is in itself an art requiring grace of manner and decision of action, as devoid of abruptness as of indecision. The leave-taking of many people is trying in the extreme, not on pathetic grounds, but because of a way peculiar to them of hovering between remaining and departing; they rise, they shake hands, and still they linger, not because they have anything particularly to say, but because of the difficulty they experience of getting themselves away.

When a lady has paid, as she considers, a sufficiently long visit, if she has been forming any plans with her hostess, of however simple a nature, she would, on rising from her seat, and while extending her hand to her hostess, refer incidentally to them, which would be a graceful preparation to leave-taking, such as,—

"Then you will let me know if I may expect you

next Monday? Good-bye;" and the reply would probably be,—

"Certainly I will. Good-bye;" or "I shall say good bye then. I may expect you on Saturday." And the answer would be,—

"Yes; I won't forget. At three, I think you said. Good-bye;" or when there is nothing of this sort to go upon, no reminding words to supplement the leave-taking, the visitor would rise, and, while extending her hand, say sweetly and blandly,—

"I think I must say good-bye;" and the hostess would reply equally sweetly and blandly,—

"Good-bye; I am so glad to have seen you," while accompanying her visitor to the drawing-room door.

When making adieux it is not usual to say "Good afternoon," or "Good morning," but simply "Good-bye." Between friends and acquaintances the expressions of "Good afternoon," or "Good day," are not recognized, neither is "Good morning" said to friends or acquaintances, save at the breakfast hour. The terms of "Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are chiefly in use between superiors and their inferiors, and *vice versa*, and between business men. (See chapter on Vulgarisms.)

Men, more especially professional and business men, having but a superficial knowledge of each other, generally make use of this term of "Good

morning" in their mutual recognitions, when not being sufficiently intimate to use the familiar "How are you?" which is the usual salutation between men when well acquainted with each other.

When a call is made upon a friend of the hostess (whose guest she is), and not upon the hostess herself, if she happens to be present when the visitor is announced, she would, after a few moments of conversation, leave the friends to themselves, not quitting the room abruptly, but with easy self-possession, perhaps remarking to her guest, while rising from her seat, "I shall leave you now—I dare say you have a great many things to talk over;" or "I have ordered the carriage at three. So I will come back for you in about half-an-hour, if you like." Any trivial remark relating to domestic affairs might be made so as to avoid leaving the drawing-room silently or hastily.

On the subject of bridal calls,* if a married lady were placed in the position of having to make her first call, unaccompanied by her husband, and so under the necessity of introducing herself to the bride, a remark of this description would be the most applicable under the circumstances,—

" You must let me introduce myself to you, our husbands are great friends, so we ought to know one another." To which the bride would probably reply,

* See the work before alluded to, pp. 37, 38, "Morning Calls."

"It is so kind of you to come and see me. I know my husband is devoted to Mr. K., and he will be so pleased to hear that you have been to see me."

And from this point the small talk might be easily carried on from the respective merits of Mr. J. and Mr. K. to less personal topics.

CHAPTER III.

THINGS TO SAY TO NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WITH reference to introductions, it is unnecessary to observe, that a request made by one person to another for an introduction to a third, does not come under the denomination of small talk, as a direct personal request, or the asking a favour—or, in fact, any conversation taking place having a direct aim, or a direct reason for its occurring, is outside the question of small talk ; small talk being made for the occasion, the occasion not being created that small talk may be indulged in.

When introductions are made between persons on ceremony with each other, it is usual to pave the way for this being done by a few polite preliminaries after this fashion—

“Mrs. A. was asking me if I would introduce her to you ; I wonder if I may ?” or, “Mrs. A. would so like to know you, she has met so many of your people, she says ;” or, “I should so like to introduce Mrs. A. to you—you would like her so much ;” or,

“ You don’t know Mrs. A., I think ? I must introduce you to her, she gives so many amusing things ; it would be very nice for you to know her.” (The introducing you to HER would be said in the case of Mrs. A. being of higher rank or social position than Mrs. B.). Or, “ I must try and make an opportunity presently, and introduce you to Mrs. A. ; you would get on very well with her, I am sure, she is very bright and clever.”

If the proposed introduction were agreeable, and under such circumstances it could hardly be otherwise, the acquiescence would probably take this form : “ Oh, certainly ; I should be very pleased to know her ; ” or, “ Oh, has she ! I wonder where ? you must introduce me to her, certainly ; ” or, “ I should be very glad to know her ; I should think she was very charming from what you say ; ” or, “ Thank you very much ; I should like to know her immensely ; ” or, “ Yes, please, do ; I have often wanted to know her.”

If the proposed introduction were for some reason or other not desired, a polite negative would be expressed—

“ Thank you very much, but—but I don’t think I care about it ; ” or, “ It is very kind of you, but from what I have seen of her, I don’t think I should care for her much ; ” or, “ I don’t think you must introduce us ; I believe my husband quite hates

Mr. A. I think there was some unpleasantness at the Club, but I don't know ;" or, "Oh! I am rather afraid of Mrs. A., I hear she says such very sharp things about people." Reasons such as these might render an introduction undesirable, in which case a refusal would be couched in some such manner of speech as the above.

The subject of introductions has been so thoroughly exhausted in a former work, that it would be superfluous to refer to it again in the present one.

Persons being casually and unexpectedly introduced to each other, often experience a certain amount of difficulty in starting a conversation, or in other words, in making small talk, unless supported by the person by whom the introduction has been made ; and it is precisely at the moment an introduction has been made, that pleasant, bright "small talk" does such good service in promoting future intercourse, and in creating a favourable impression.

Delicate flattery, rather implied than expressed, is one of the most soothing and satisfactory modes of making way with a stranger. This, though a bold flight to take, and a broad statement to make, is nevertheless founded on a wide experience of human nature, and of society as at present constituted.

A person with a flattering tongue, or who is ever telling a flattering tale, is very rightly considered to be a most untrustworthy and objectionable individual,

and has justly been held up to universal reprobation by every moralist, essayist, historian, and novelist.

But the flattery current in society does not consist of insincere compliments, indiscriminately launched, with a view of propitiating, or of cultivating, some one in particular with whom the flatterer is anxious to ingratiate himself, but rather springs from a just and honest appreciation of the merits of the one to whom it is offered ; flattery of this nature, if indeed it may be called flattery, is thus divested of one of the chief characteristics of flattery, namely, humbug. The putting this honest appreciation into well chosen words, and the making it felt by the one who is the object of it, exactly at the right time and at the right moment, has the effect of putting a person on thoroughly good terms with himself, and consequently with the one who has occasioned this very pleasant sensation ; but when this honest appreciation is handled in a rough, clumsy, and unskilful manner it produces exactly the contrary effect to that it was intended to produce, and has the appearance of the coarsest flattery, and is both distasteful and repugnant to its recipient.

Small talk that has this end in view, namely, the creating a favourable impression, hardly ever fails of its end, as a sincere endeavour to please ^{and} to be pleased, is usually crowned with success.

On an introduction being made, any small fact or incident relating to the one, and known to the other, would be touched upon in the first instance; facts, however insignificant, always serve as a *cheral de bataille*, and can be elaborated or not as the occasion demands. Some such lead as the following would soon place two comparative strangers thoroughly at their ease. "I am so glad to have met you—I have often heard of you from the M.'s."

"Oh, do you know the M.'s? We saw a great deal of them last year; I daresay they told you what pleasant expeditions we made together," &c. ; or, "I have so often wished to make your acquaintance, I seem to know you so well by sight;" or the conversation might branch into another direction.

"I hope we shall hear you sing this afternoon, I hear you have a lovely voice;" and the owner of the lovely voice would answer this observation in either a deprecatory or confident spirit, accordingly as she felt upon the subject. From this point scope would be afforded for a considerable amount of small talk, relating to music and musicians, and from thence could diverge into other paths.

The children of the hostess, a little dog, or anything,—or any idea suggested at the moment by the various surroundings, would invariably serve as an opening for the making of small talk, always bearing in mind, that the subject mooted must not be

permitted to expire spasmodically, and that it is actually intended as a lead to further conversation. A few disjointed remarks, thrown out in a disjointed manner, and as it were leading to nothing, would be beneath the appellation of small talk, and could but be considered as mere remarks, having no claim to be termed conversation, say, for instance, remarks of this description and of like brevity.

“What luxuriant hair that little girl has.”

“Yes, it is very pretty hair ;” or “What a handsome little dog that is.”

“Yes, it is a nice little dog, it seems very quiet ;” or “Those are very fine roses. Are you fond of flowers ?”

“Yes, very.”

Either of the foregoing remarks taken singly, might have served as the groundwork of an exceedingly pleasant conversation ; taken collectively, their proper appellation would be “twaddle.” To commence with the first trite observation,—

“What luxuriant hair that little girl has ?”

“Yes ; how becoming it is to children the wearing the hair in that style, it is very picturesque, and carries one back to the Joshua Reynolds period.”

“Yes, and the style in which children are now dressed, greatly strengthens the impression, &c., &c.”

To the second trite remark of “What a handsome little dog that is,” in place of replying that “it is a nice

little dog," it might be suggested that it is a handsome pug, toy-terrier, fox-terrier, skye-terrier, or whatever the breed might be, coupled with the inquiry as to which breed of dogs is preferred, together with one's own predilections on the subject. Almost every lady has something to say on the subject of dogs, if this subject is but judiciously led up to. Almost every lady has, or has had a pet dog of her own, upon whose perfections and excellencies she is ever ready to expatiate, but if a lady has an antipathy to dogs, she must have a reason for this antipathy, which she would be ready to disclose to any one inclined to call it forth.

Again the most common-place and conventional allusion to flowers, gives an opening for much that is interesting to be said. Ladies are naturally fond of flowers, and have usually much to say upon the culture and care of them, while those who know but little of their culture, have artistic ideas respecting their arrangement. In this way, observations of the most vapid and insipid order may be turned to very good account in the art of making small talk on a first introduction.

CHAPTER IV.

DINNER-TABLE TALK.

PLEASANT, agreeable "small talk," necessary as it is on all social occasions, is more particularly so at the most important of all social gatherings, namely, dinner-parties, and it is at dinner-parties that the greatest call is made upon the social qualities of the guests, and upon their powers of making themselves agreeable.

We do not pretend to question whether society has done the best thing for itself in adhering so strictly to the rules of precedence with regard to its dinner-parties, and whether society would not be greatly the gainer could it but discover some other outlet for recognizing the various degrees of rank of the various guests, other than the actual penance that is nightly inflicted upon long-suffering humanity by the slavish observance of precedence, an observance which too often divests a dinner-party of every scintillation of brightness and geniality through the compulsory ill-assortment of the guests.

Rank should at all times receive its just and proper

due, and “no man disparages birth, but he who hath it not;” actual rank, would not probably overweight very many dinner-parties, but it is the precedence society is compelled to accord to the most trifling degree of birth, extending over so wide an arena, from the chains of which it is a matter of great difficulty, if not of impossibility, to escape. It would be greatly preferable could society originate some sign or token which would satisfy the guests at a dinner-party that their claims to precedence were fully allowed, and as fully understood by the hostess, and by the company in general; say, for instance, a raised dais in the drawing-room, or seats set apart at the upper end of the room as at a public ball, to which the guests on their arrival might be severally conducted, or any other mark of distinction granted them which could at the same time be made to enlighten the company as to their individual degrees of birth other than by sending them down to dinner according to the claims of their ancestors rather than on their own merits.

It is especially at the hour of dinner that the heart of man expands and when all the geniality of his nature rises to the surface; even the most taciturn, reserved, and rugged natures are not insensible to the influence of the hour; therefore, uncongenial companionship at a moment such as this, compulsory companionship, which must continue for at least two hours, is a strain put by society upon its

members, and from whence there is no escape but in escaping from society itself.

Precedency often obliges a host to take down and try to amuse the dowdiest, dullest, and least attractive lady in the room, as commonplace as she is trite ; the hostess, likewise, has probably to put up with perhaps the stupidest man present because he happens to be a little better born than any of the other guests, and so on up and down the gamut of the guests, birth *versus* everything else, each and every couple being sacrificed to its claim.

The sitting above or below the salt was in ancient days the distinctive mark between lord and vassal, but in these levelling days it seems a trifle rococo, and savours of an undue clinging to the traditions of the past to attach so great an importance as to who should or should not go in to dinner before the other.

But as society thinks fit to pair its guests according to precedence only, and with but little regard to individual tastes, sympathies, and likings, it behoves its members to make the best of the situation and to be as agreeable as they well can be under the circumstances by cultivating the pleasing and useful art of small talk.

Genuine small talk must not be confounded with the senseless, ceaseless babble of the Nickleby order, or with a string of platitudes and common-

places, interspersed here and there with an old saw or a vulgar proverb, savouring slightly of the servants' hall. This style of running on, common to so many weakminded but well-meaning persons is even more irritating to the clever intellectual or gifted ones of the earth than is the dullness, stupidity and reserve of those common-place people from whom nothing more lively can be obtained than a monosyllable uttered at intervals. The gist of small talk is, the having something to say and saying it well. It is not given to every one to be brilliant and amusing with a capacity for making small talk independent of facts and passing events, therefore the mass of individuals who are neither brilliant, gifted, talented, nor in any way geniuses, have no other resource than to draw upon facts and events when starting a conversation ; and a very good, excellent, unfailing resource it is, but the peculiarity is, that the generality of ordinary people fail to make use of this wealth of subjects at their command, ready as it were to their hand, to be turned to good account. To be aware of a fact, event, or incident, which might have been made a vehicle of pleasant talk being *apropos* of the moment is one thing, and to recollect it *apropos* of the moment, is another thing, and thus many slow-witted people call to mind hours afterwards some circumstance which had they but thought of it at the time would have been the one thing about which they might have conversed

and so made themselves agreeable. They remember good things they might have said some twelve hours after the opportunity has arisen for the saying them, a little late for the purpose of shining as agreeable talkers.

It is a prevailing idea with some people that it does not require much cleverness to be able to weld facts and incidents into entertaining small talk, and yet it is surprising how little skill is shown by these very people in their treatment of subjects of an everyday character, and how very little intelligence they bring to bear upon the discussion of them.

There are certain people who rely upon the telling of a good story as their speciality, and gain for themselves a notoriety and reputation in this line, and this is an amusing line to take, but there is one thing to be avoided, which the tellers of these good stories are very apt to overlook, and that is the facility they have of forgetting to whom they have told their last good story, and the consequent repetition of it to the same person ; it must be a very good story that does not suffer from this second hearing. It would be throwing back the narrator in his efforts to be amusing to remind him that one had heard the story before, and that he himself had narrated it.

I don't know if I have told you the story about, &c., &c., is a good preamble to the telling of a good story, as it gives the opportunity for any one to say that they

have heard it, or that they should very much like to hear it, and the story-teller escapes being characterized as "prosy," a reputation which too often clings to gentlemen who take up this line. People not sufficiently intimate with the narrator to arrest the telling of a story by remarking, "Oh, yes, I have heard that before, it is a capital story," generally receive the repetition of it in an absent manner and with an artificial little laugh which the narrator, ignorant of the cause, attributes to a want of appreciation or a lack of humour on their part. One of the best modes of telling a good story is perhaps by preserving the strictest gravity throughout the relation, and at the close to lead, as it were, the laughter by a genuine hearty laugh, which is always contagious and mirth-provoking. Laughter is to the storyteller what applause is to the actor, and without which the best story falls flat.

The art of telling a story really well is to make it fit into or illustrate some incident or other appertaining to the moment; whereas the straining after an opening through which to bring in a good story is so palpable an effort that it is at once seen through.

A story-teller who possesses a coadjutor amongst the company has an advantage over other men, whose forte it also is to relate good things. A clever wife is the best of coadjutors, or failing her, a *fidus Achates*, who, although appreciating a good story does not

aspire to be a story-teller himself, but is content to give his friend a lift and a lead when opportunity offers. The clever wife, who wishes to give her husband an opening for the telling of one of his good stories would contrive to make some remark calculated to turn the conversation in the direction where the good story lay, or if she saw her way to it, she would ask for the story outright by saying :—" My husband knows a capital story about that ; have you ever heard it ?" or, " Ask my husband to tell you a good story about this very thing ; " or, " My husband knows a much better story than that, if you can only persuade him to tell it you ; " thus the clever wife plays into her husband's hands and gives him just the opportunity he wants for the display of his talent in this direction. The *fidus Achates* does not *finesse* as does the clever wife, but boldly, and bluntly, asks for the story *apropos* of the occasion ; and besides being the one to give his friend the start, he is equally ready to lead the laughter at the finish, he is never tired of hearing his friend's stories ; indeed, he has a sort of partnership in them, and is proud of the success they achieve.

There are certain men, who, aware of their weakness in the matter of making agreeable small talk, read up a subject either from a new or an old work, it is immaterial which, and being thus crammed for the occasion, they contrive during the course of the dinner to introduce it somehow *bon gré mal gré* ; but

people of average intelligence and moderately well read are generally aware of the source from whence such information springs, and hardly give the crammed one credit for all the trouble he has taken in getting up his subject.

There are several descriptions of small talk current at dinner-parties, common to the various individuals whose ideas and thoughts they respectively embody and illustrate; to wit, the commonplace, the matter-of-fact, the gossipy, the polite, the humorous, the vivacious, the speculative, the intellectual, the imaginative, the dry, the sarcastic, the epigrammatical, and the practical, &c. Those endowed with high conversational powers, naturally take high conversational honours, whilst those who are not so endowed play their little round game or their simple rubber in a very tame fashion.

Two persons, strangers to each other, sent in to dinner together by their host, not unnaturally experience a slight hesitation as to with what agreeable remark they shall commence the conversation; both feel while descending the staircase that it is incumbent upon them to make an observation of some kind, and if one or other, or both, should happen to be afflicted with shyness, or reserve, they probably maintain a perfect silence until seated at table, each feeling rather annoyed at being sent in to dinner with such a very dull person; and fearing, moreover, that

to judge from this un-promising commencement, the next two hours' *tête-à-tête* will not be a particularly lively one.

A good impression created as to one's sociability, is a great step towards pleasant companionship, the which is a most essential ingredient to a dinner-party. *Gourmands* who prefer eating their dinner in silence to the most intellectual of banquets, are beside this question which so greatly concerns the general run of men, who, if occasionally *gourmets* are still less frequently *gourmands*.

To make pleasant easy small talk is to pave the way towards pleasant companionship, and the slightest thread is capable of being woven into a substantial fabric. A matter-of-fact conversation often commences in this wise, "We must take care not to tread upon that smart train," referring to the dress of a lady who was preceding a couple to the dining-room.

"Yes, that would never do; trains are very graceful, if they are inconvenient." To which her companion might observe—

"Oh, I admire them, of course; I am only so afraid of treading upon them, and of bringing down the wrath of the fair wearer upon my devoted head."

"Are you very unlucky in this way? and do you think a woman could not keep her temper if her gown were trodden upon?"

“Well, if you ask me really what I think about it, I should say she was a very exceptional woman if she stood such a test—but here we are; we are to sit this side.”

Or—“I was in the park this afternoon; it seemed very full.”

“I suppose so. I was at two afternoon parties, and only took one turn in the park, very late.”

“There are very many afternoon parties going on just now. I have three invitations for to-morrow; but I do not think I shall go to any of them.”

“Shall you not? do you dislike afternoon parties so much? I wonder why men do dislike them so?”

“Well, you see, one likes to be out of doors at that time of the day, and not to be boxed up in a crowd, and having to make one's self useful the whole time—giving all the old ladies tea, and listening to some conceited fellow, who thinks he can sing.”

“Well, it does not sound very lively from your point of view; but afternoon parties are to us ladies what Clubs are to you men—one meets people one knows at them, one's friends, and it is a pleasant way of seeing them.”

“Can you not see them just as well in the evening, and get all the fresh air possible during the day?”

“Well, no; women have very little opportunity of talking to each other in the evening; society does not arrange it so.”

“Well, I suppose not; we men monopolise you, you mean to say. Perhaps we do.”

“Oh! I don’t go quite so far as that; but you know one dines, and one dances, and one really does talk a great deal more to men in the evening than to the women one knows.”

“Then, by your own showing, we men are better away at afternoon parties; you can get on very well without us, I see.”

Or—“Did you go and see the meet of coaches at the magazine, this morning? it was a very full one, and quite worth seeing.”

“No; I am sorry to say I did not; my husband drives a team in the country, but not in town, and we make a great many excursions far and near when we are down in Blankshire.”

“Yes, that is a capital way of seeing the country. I know something of your county; I was down there hunting last season, staying with the D—s. Do you know them at all?”

“Hardly; they live miles off us—quite the other side of the county. I know some great friends of theirs, the G—s; they are our best neighbours.”

Or—“I think I have met a brother of yours—a man in the 160th.”

“Oh, no! he is only a cousin of mine, I have no brothers in the army.”

“Oh, really, I knew him very slightly ; the coincidence of name struck me, that was all.”

“His regiment is coming home in the autumn, I believe.”

“Why, I thought he was to be out there five years at least.”

Or—“Have you been to the French plays ? I suppose you have.”

“No, indeed, I have not ; we thought of going one night next week, if we can get stalls.”

“If you want to see a really good piece you should try and see——” and at this point of the conversation the name of the “only piece worth seeing” would be mentioned, and if the lady were endowed with tact and cleverness, she would lead her companion to give her his impressions of the piece, and of the cast ; by which means she would gain a certain knowledge of the subject, while he would gain, what men most appreciate, a good listener. On such slight foundations as the foregoing, does the matter of fact, or the commonplace small talk rest. The gossipy and the polite small talk have a still flimsier *raison d'être* and run very much after this fashion. “I hear that beautiful house So-and-so built has been sold ; I don't know the name of the man who bought it, but they say he is very rich.”

“Really, what do you suppose he gave for it ? something enormous, I should think.”

"Oh yes, I should not like to say what he did give, I have heard two or three different sums named," &c.

Or—"I suppose there is no doubt now about the truth of that story, every one is talking of it."

"What story are you alluding to in particular? I don't think I have heard anything new lately."

"What not about Lady X.? it is the best story you have ever heard, &c., &c.," whereupon the gossip will proceed to enlighten his companion as to this especial piece of gossip. To turn to the strictly polite small talk,—

"Will you allow me to offer you my left arm, I am so afraid that the trimming on your dress will sustain further damage. I think I have extricated it now without very much injury."

"Yes, thank you, these flimsy gowns are always rather a bore, but I have one or two things to go to this evening, and I am going on to rather an amusing ball at Mrs. T.'s."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mrs. T. I think she is very charming. You will sit in a draught I am afraid if I place you here, but it seems we cannot help it," &c., &c.

Conversation that takes place between couples while going down to dinner, or what might be termed staircase conversation, scarcely ever soars above or beyond such trivialities as the foregoing, that is to say, between strangers or very slight acquaintances, who

have, as it were, to feel their way step by step to discover what amount of conversational powers each possesses, that they may either talk up to or down to such standard, and the first few sentences, falling from the lips of an individual like the opening bars of a piece of music, are sufficiently suggestive of what is likely to follow.

As has before been said, facts are invaluable in starting a conversation, facts for instance connected with mutual friends either absent or present, inquiries after them if absent, allusions to them if present, society facts of mutual interest, public events of importance, or things appertaining to the moment,—say the *menu*.

“Would you like to look at the *menu*?” observes a gentleman to the lady whom he has taken down to dinner, handing it to her, as he speaks, after having rapidly glanced at it himself.

“Thank you,” returns the lady, taking it from him. “What is ‘Idem à la Béchamel?’ referring to some dish that is new to her, and a lady, whether married or single, never need to blush at displaying her ignorance where an *entrée* or made dish is concerned. A man does not think less of a woman for being unversed in the mysteries of French cooking; if he has any knowledge of the to her unknown dish, he is pleased to impart it; and if the dish is a stranger to him he is equally willing to discuss it, and to

speculate as to its nature, and after a little discussion on the comprehensiveness of the *menu*, the lady says, with a view of discovering whether her companion is of the silent order of diner-out or not,

“Some people do not appear inclined to eat and talk at the same time, the few observations they make merely coming in between the courses.”

“He must be a dull fellow who cannot contrive to do both, with satisfaction to his fair neighbour if not to himself,” is the style of answer, in the one case, or in the other it might be—

“I hope you won’t think me quite a bear if I own to a predilection for doing one thing at a time;” and a lady would shape her reply accordingly, thus she would say :

“Then I may talk to you without fear of interrupting your enjoyment of your dinner? but you put it as if it were easier to please your neighbour than yourself.”

“You must attribute that speech to my gallantry; ladies are so good-natured, they are kind enough to be pleased with so little, and to take the will for the deed, while my modesty forbids my taking credit to myself for any efforts of mine.”

“I often find that those men who are the least ready to take merit to themselves are the most worthy of it, and I expect great things of you in consequence.”

“I am afraid I have unwittingly raised your expectations, and that you are doomed to disappointment.”

“If I am eventually disappointed, perhaps the fault will be my own, and after all, expectation is the better part of life.”

“Has realization with you then always fallen short of expectation?”

“In a way, yes; but I am afraid I am rather inclined to allow my imagination to run away with me.”

“Imagination is about the safest companion that you could have in your flight, and the one of whom you would be the least likely to tire.”

“Do you never tire of your own thoughts—your own imaginings, and your own company?”

“Very often of all three; but then I am more practical than poetical, and day-dreams enter but slightly into my composition; you volatile feminine essences are always floating more or less towards those regions.”

“I am not foolish enough to indulge in day-dreams,” returns the lady. “I think people whose lives are fully occupied, seldom have leisure for such an amusement; but how good these *Pâtés de Cailles* are, to change the subject to one less ethereal; I think it seems very cruel, the way these poor little birds are kept alive in flat wooden boxes on view at the poulters.”

“That they may fatten the more readily, I suppose; it is rather uncomfortable for them to be cooped up in

that way, I should say. You, ladies, are so tender-hearted, and have your sympathies so easily aroused ; but how about the birds you wear in your hats, and the wings that adorn them, are not the lives of the gay-plumaged feathered fowl sacrificed to your vanity ? ”

“ Sacrificed, perhaps, but let us hope not tortured ; sacrificed as you sacrifice the partridges and pheasants to your prowess at your grand battues, when almost wholesale slaughter usurps the place of legitimate sport.”

“ The other side of the question is, that when an owner of a manor has a shooting party, he naturally shoots his best coverts, and is proud of making a fine bag,” rejoins the man.

“ I suppose he would do so, but it seems to me, that to shoot the young pheasants that have been reared and fed in the home pheasantry until they have become quite tame and accustomed to man, is little better than shooting the chickens in the poultry-yard.”

“ Ah, the poultry-yard ! that is essentially the ladies’ preserve ; and although the feathered fowl do not fall by your hand, they do so at your command, and your pretty little theories respecting man’s cruelty will not hold water ; but they sound amiable and feminine, and are the ideas that come well from your sex ; indeed, we would not have it otherwise—with a woman oftener than not it is feeling *versus* reason ; and

as we are credited with so large a share of the one, and so small a share of the other, we naturally admire the quality in which we are deficient."

"Speaking of qualities," rejoins the lady, "what a remarkable thing is the transmission of qualities both bad and good."

"Very true, and ~~that~~ they become gradually evolved and intensified as they pass on from sire to son, until in some, certain powers become abnormal, exceptional, phenomenal, as in Murphy, the chess player, or in Bidder, the calculating boy; and if one faculty be unusually strong and active, some other will be proportionally weak and dwarfed; hence the very clever mathematician is often a child in worldly matters."

"I suppose also, that the over-educating one faculty has a tendency to leave other portions of the mind dormant?"

"That may be the case with ordinary minds, but I hold that when one faculty is pre-eminently superior to another, the concentration of the energies of the mind on that particular point becomes a part of a man's being, providing that circumstances are favourable to its development. But how often it is that circumstances are too strong and carry a man in a totally opposite direction, and only the most indomitable will, or the most lucky of chances, can set the tide in his favour; I think Dr. Schliemann's career in a measure illustrates my meaning." . . .

To accompany a couple further who are thus at their ease with each other, would be a superfluous illustration ; as from a point such as this, many paths would be open to them—literature of the past and of the present, travel and research ; or the conversation could take a lower range, and embrace the affairs of the moment, relative to the dinner, or the dinner-party. But to return to the starting point, and see how a lady would fare with a man for her neighbour, who had declared his inability to the doing two things at the same time, eating and talking, to such a reply as the one previously given, she would probably say :

“ You are not singular in your choice ; there are, I believe, many people who cannot say agreeable things, and enjoy the pleasures of the palate at the same moment, and in devoting themselves to the one they lose the subtle aroma of the other, which they prefer to ‘ the feast of reason and the flow of soul.’ ”

“ You are very severe ; this comes of having . answered your question in good faith. Now, if I had finessed and beat about the bush, and left you in doubt as to what I did, or did not like, I should have risen ten per cent. in your estimation ; it is not too late, however, I will sacrifice the next tempting *entrée* which I see is sweetbreads in your honour and endeavour to recover a place in your favour.”

“ By no means ; I decline to be propitiated by such an alarming sacrifice and such self-abnegation.”

“ My resolution is taken, the sweetbreads are at hand, and I waive them from me.”

“ I am really sorry,” observes the lady, “ I am afraid you have deprived yourself of a favourite dish. I am quite vexed with myself for having involuntarily led up to it.”

“ You are very amiable, but I am obtaining your sympathy under false pretences, and at the risk of sinking still lower in your esteem. I must confess that I have been guilty of a subterfuge, and that I never eat sweetbreads, on principle; let me whisper my reason, for fear of spoiling the appetites of those around us: ‘ a sweetbread is—a gland ! ’ ”

“ Is that so! Then I shall never be able to eat sweetbreads again; please do not make any further revelations to me of this nature, or I shall become a vegetarian on the spot.”

“ If you are thus easily converted to my way of thinking, I must be additionally careful as to the doctrines I inculcate; if the position is a flattering one, it has also its responsibilities.”

“ Save on the question of food, I do not think you would find me so amenable to your teaching. I am not quite so plastic and ready to take an impression as I have led you to suppose.”

“ Is this defiance or only defence on your part? if it is defiance, I shall commence hostilities at once.”

“ To be honest with you, a little of both was intended,

but so little of the one, that I think you may accept my proposals for a truce or an honourable peace ; and now it is to be peace, as I must not interfere with the enjoyment of your cutlet."

"Your friend opposite," the lady might further add, "appears to be relating something amusing, what is it he is saying?"

When the host or any one present is relating a story for the amusement of his immediate neighbours, a woman of tact would discontinue, but not too abruptly, any light skirmishing small-talk she was engaged in, that her companion might have the option of hearing the gist of the story, and of joining in the general comments that usually follow upon a well-told story, anecdote, or narration of some interesting incident.

To take the *rôle* of the humorous and vivacious demands a flow of good spirits and the feeling of being thoroughly at home, a sort of *enfant gâté* of the house. Givers of dinners, diners out, *bon vivants*, *gourmets*, and *gourmands*, find that the question of "*cuisine*" is an exhaustible topic in the making of dinner-table small talk, it being thoroughly understood that the dinner being discussed is not a subject for present discussion, whether it be a repast worthy of Lucullus, or whether everything be cold save the champagne, or whether there be everything or nothing to eat. New dishes, and new ways of serving old dishes, novelties of any shape or kind,

are all of interest to those who give dinners, and are always within the most limited powers of observation of those who dine out, and unimaginative practical-minded individuals contrive to get over a good deal of ground, and to acquire a wrinkle or two by the ventilation of this particular topic.

Apart from the question of *cuisine* and gastronomy, is the far wider question of "self," consciously or unconsciously. "Self"—that is—"I am," is the most pleasing subject that can be broached. Whether this feeling, sentiment, or sensation, be of a pronounced or of a passive nature, it always exists in a larger or smaller degree, and is there to be played upon by the hand of a skilful performer. Of all harmonious sounds, the music of one's own voice, with one's self for its subject, is of all strains the most beguiling; consequently the one capable of drawing forth this pleasing melody, takes high rank in one's estimation, and as this instrument—the inherent selfishness existing in most men and women—is so easily played upon, and as the playing upon it has no other mainspring than the putting men and women on good terms with themselves and on good terms with one's self, and as "self" is of all topics the one a man or woman is fairly and justly entitled to talk about, his or her own doings, own feelings, own impressions, and own convictions, in preference to the doings or sayings of his or her neighbour, it is both allowable, justifiable, and in

every way fitting, that this safe and pleasant outlet should be permitted and encouraged.

The conversation which takes place between men, both at dinner and after dinner, even though strangers to each other, usually takes the practical and common sense turn. So practical, and so instinct with common sense, that it is apart from small talk altogether ; politics, the money market, the state of trade, and all in which men have both a private and public interest, are discussed in so broad and so vigorous a manner, that it would be idle to look upon such conversation in the light of small talk.

A dinner-party of eight is very generally considered to be a most sociable number, as it admits of the conversation being general ; the smaller number, six, not offering sufficient variety or versatility for the purpose, while the larger number, twelve, or even ten, takes the charmed circle without the bounds of the friendly and familiar, and brings it within that of the conventional and the ceremonious.

The conversation at these pleasant dinners of eight, is carried beyond the region of *tête-à-tête* dialogue, which is the usual order of things at dinner parties of larger dimensions, as each individual composing the party of eight is expected to sustain his or her part, and to add his or her share to the general fund of talk, one individual drawing out the other. An idea started by one is taken up by another, passed on to a

third, and is met, perhaps, by a still brighter ray from a fourth, thus offering a series of opportunities for all that is lively and bright, sparkling and witty, deep or profound, in all or any of the guests present to be brought into play. In the organising of these dinner-parties of eight, there are usually included one or even two superior intelligences who shine spontaneously, whose light is inextinguishable, and whose radiancy is undimmed by the proximity of other lights; others again, like phosphorus, shine in the dark, and are extinguished by the noonday glare. It not uncommonly happens that two or three acknowledged clever talkers whose *esprit* runs in the same groove—counteract each other's agreeable powers; while those whose talents lie in opposite directions, serve as whetstones for the sharpening of each other's wits. Thus, at a dinner of eight, everyone is on the alert to catch what is being said, as the ball may be thrown in his direction at any moment, and his skill as a conversational bowler be put to the test. The host is often the best bowler of the party through knowing the style of play of his various guests, and the special points in which they excel. A. would, perhaps, remark—

“I hear Lord L.'s illness was entirely owing to drinking iced water. I can quite understand it, it gives a shock to the system, I suppose.”

To which Mr. B. might rejoin—

“Not a bit of it. I have drunk water all my life, and the shocks my system has received have not sprung from that source.”

Mrs. C. might here join in with—

“Shocks are very serious things, I think; that which affects the body too often affects the mind, the one reacting upon the other; that is why I think sudden death is so terrible to the survivors, though I must not be lugubrious. I was thinking of something rather sad that I heard before I came here to-night, but I ought to bring a merry heart to a feast.”

The host, Mr. D., would perhaps gallantly strike in with—

“In bringing yourself, Mrs. C., you bring the best part of the feast.”

Here Miss E. might remark—

“If Mrs. C. is the best part of the feast, what is Mrs. F., and what am I? Have you not a compliment for us?”

D. might reply with *empressement*—

“A hundred, my dear Miss E., if you would only give me the opportunity of making them; opportunity is a great ally.”

G. might here put in—

“Opportunity is a great ally, but propinquity is a greater—half the marriages that take place are, I should say, the result of propinquity and opportunity combined; we are creatures of habit, if we are

not creatures of impulse; propinquity paves the way for the liking, and opportunity for declaring the liking, which, through propinquity, has ripened into love."

Here, Mr. H., being a bit of a misanthrope, might throw out as a suggestion—

"In my experience of life, not a few of the marriages we hear of are the result of woman's wiles and man's weakness. A kind-hearted young fellow is so perpetually told that a girl is fond of him, that sooner or later he probably ends by marrying her."

A.—"You do not believe that a higher power than human will controls marriages?"

H.—"I should be very sorry to think so from those I have seen. I should say the mainsprings of many were caprice, and vanity, with a crowning desire to acquire some one else's goods and possessions."

A.—"Well, I must say, H., you have not a very high opinion of those who enter into the holy state of matrimony. I suppose that is why you have not embarked in it yourself."

D.—"It looks as if H. were the victim of an unhappy attachment, but if there is any reciprocity in love, there is no reason why a marriage should not be a happy one. One hears of all the mistakes, *fiascos*, *fracas*, and matrimonial differences—they become public property, as it were—but there are no statistics published of happy marriages, otherwise H. might be induced to alter his opinion."

B.—“What I cannot understand is the proneness of widowers to take up their chains almost as soon as they are free, I call it the triumph of Hope over Experience.”

Mrs. F.—“I don’t quite like the way in which you are disposing of this subject; we ladies think so much of marriage, and you men appear to think so little of it.”

D.—“My dear Mrs. F., appearances are deceitful; language is given us to conceal our thoughts, and all that; and H. and B. are probably at this moment entertaining proposals of marriage.”

A.—“Very probably. It took me at least a month to make up my mind whether I would or would not propose to Mrs. A.”

B.—“You were hovering about the brink so long, and had nearly slipped in so frequently, that you rather liked the danger, I suppose, if only to show how sure-footed you were.”

A.—“No, I was doubtful of my capacity of making her happy, and feared that my means would hardly carry out my views for her welfare.”

B.—“It proves that you were not a young curate at that time, or you would not have concerned yourself much about your means or your future. I think the poor young curate is about as heedless and improvident an individual as can well be imagined; he commences his career by giving ‘hostages to fortune,’ and is thus overweighted unto the very end.”

At this point, perhaps, one of the party would bring forward some case that had come under his personal observation either in corroboration or in refutation of this opinion. Personal knowledge is a great incentive to conversation, but in constructing suitable small talk to serve as an example as to how conversation may most readily be carried on through and from one subject to another, this valuable aid has been on all possible occasions purposely excluded, for the reason that when this mutual ground exists, and people are in a position to refer to whom and to what they have seen, and to what they have done, and are going to do, or to where they have, or have not been, the difficulty of making small talk is disposed of; but as there is no rule without an exception, and as many do not know how to make use of the materials thus supplied by the current events of everyday life, to them a few suggestions how to handle these subjects with facility and ease, devoid of effort or strain of any kind, may be of service.

The newest play is always a useful topic to start, as it affords scope for the expressing of many diverse opinions.

Thus—

A.—“You have seen the new piece, of course, at the ——?”

B.—“I was there last night, the house was crowded; the M—s were in the stalls, just in front of

us, and the Y—s were in the same row as ourselves.”

Mrs. C.—“I did not know the Y—s were in town ; where are they staying ?”

Miss E.—“I have not seen the piece Mr. A. is talking about ; is it very good ?”

A.—“It is, and it is not ; the piece is decidedly weak, but the acting is first rate ; the dresses play a conspicuous part ; you might get a wrinkle, Miss E., as to the fashion and make of a garment.”

B.—“Miss E. should go to Paris if she wishes to adopt the latest styles and fashions of the ladies of the theatre ; there these ladies apparently set the fashion, and bonnets and caps and gowns are individualised by their names.”

H.—“I quite agree with you, this mania for extravagant dress on the stage is one of the greatest enemies of the drama at the present moment ; art is sacrificed to it. I am not speaking of Paris theatres alone, but of our own. The leading ladies hardly care to appear in a piece which does not admit of a lavish display of elaborate gowns, the latest inventions of the modistes.”

B.—“How few really good modern plays one sees ; out of the hundreds that are written, there is scarcely one worth producing ; every woman fancies that she can write a novel, and many men believe they can write a play, but to be a good critic is one thing,

and to be a clever playwright is another ; and although a man may be capable of appreciating a good play, it does not follow that he is equal to writing one."

G.—" Well, you see, so much is required of a playwright ; the situation must be telling, the story must unfold itself, and be condensed into certainly three acts, the dialogue brisk and sparkling, the *dénouement* must not be anticipated, and be the climax of the whole, added to which, the plot should possess sufficient strength to render it worthy of the three acts of elaboration."

A.—" Exactly so. Now, your lady novelist has three volumes in which to work her own sweet will, and if she can take her grammatical fences in fairly gallant style, and can take her canter on high moral ground, and can construct a few pretty love scenes, with a tinge of pathos about them, she may expect to be fairly well spoken of, and to be in demand at all the circulating libraries."

B.—" You are right ; so little that is excellent is expected of a woman that the reviewers are merciful as they are strong, and, under these conditions, are inclined to let her down gently."

Mrs. C.—" Well, I should say, Mr. G., that our lady novelists are quite capable of holding their own. Fiction is woman's field of action—it is her strong-hold ; and in this walk of literature she will not willingly yield the palm ; in all other walks of literature and art, I admit that she is lamentably weak."

D.—“Very true; the defective education of women has had hitherto, I should say, not a little to do with this; but a brighter era is in store for your sex, my dear Mrs. C. You are to be sent to college; you are to become mathematicians and logicians; you are to enter the learned professions, and I hope some day to see a dictionary written by a woman.”

Mrs. F.—“You are aiming evidently at what you consider to be woman’s weak points—her patience and her spelling. I would not answer for her patience, and I should not like to write a dictionary myself, although I think one might get over the spelling.”

Mrs. C.—“I have an idea that if a woman gave up her life, as it were, to her work, she would make a very good historian, or biographer, as she would weave in those small details, which after all go to make up the completeness of a picture.”

H.—“The one thing against her success would be woman’s proverbial want of accuracy where dates are concerned, and her proneness to exaggerate, and to highly colour facts. I have no doubt that the book would be pleasant reading enough—lively, amusing, chatty, and all that, but I question whether it would be sufficiently reliable to be handed down to posterity.”

Miss E.—“That remains to be proved, Mr. H.; if you doubt the veracity of women as compilers of facts, you must allow that they have been eminently

successful in the isolated instances in which they have entered the medical profession, and into which they have had to fight their way step by step."

H.—"I am quite aware of that, and I consider that it is a profession for which women have a peculiar aptitude."

G.—"The one great argument against their succeeding in this line has been, I understand, their supposed want of nerve in cases of emergency."

Mrs. A.—"That is a fallacy founded upon the general belief in man's invincible calmness in the hour of danger; but in cases of sickness and disease there is hardly one man in twenty, who does not shrink and quail before an exhibition of suffering; while woman rises to the occasion, and is comforter, consoler, and nurse, rarely losing her head or presence of mind."

H.—"You are speaking of men generally, and I do not see why men belonging to the medical profession, also taken generally, should be above such weakness over other men."

D.—"Well, I must say I was always under the impression that women were very well as nurses in the sick room merely to carry out instructions, but were any further call to be made upon their powers of intelligence, and were any weight of responsibility to rest upon their shoulders, they would prove but frail reeds upon which to lean."

A.—"Against that, a celebrated oculist told me the

other day he saw no reason why women should not become very fine operators, that their delicate touch peculiarly fitted them for this branch of the profession, and that he hoped he might live to see a renowned lady oculist. He himself is one of the most liberal minded men I have ever met, and is the finest operator in Europe."

Mrs. C.—"What wonderful strides oculists have made in their branch of science of late years, what marvellous operations one hears of; cataracts have lost all their terror, and science triumphs even over age. The aurists are very much behind in their discoveries in the sister art, and have apparently made but little progress as far as one can judge from results."

H.—"Well, there is a fine opening for women in this direction, and it would be, I should say, a very suitable and fascinating branch of study for them, and to many it would be even preferable to medical practice."

General conversation is apt to concentrate itself on some particular topic; for the reason that each person adds his or her observations or individual ideas to the general stock, and thus a subject remains under discussion for some little time, but if, as is often the case, the subject is an uncongenial one to any of the party present, and if they do not care to pursue it, or if they feel that were they to do so, they would probably get out of their depth, or if the subject in hand pos-

seses little or no interest for them, they could easily create a diversion in an almost imperceptible manner, and it does not demand any considerable amount of talent to do this well, although it calls for a certain amount of judgment in striking the key note, and with due regard to time; an ill-timed interruption would not cause a divergence, but would rather tend to prolong the discussion, the only result accruing being the humiliating consciousness of the having made a false move, and of having the remark ignored or put on one side. A clever man or woman experiences but little difficulty in seizing their opportunity, and in obtaining the lead when they have any particular card they are desirous of playing; but if on the contrary, the subject were of sufficient interest to all present not to call for any subtle interference from any of the party, it would then be permitted to drift on and follow its own course, winding in and out, eddying round and round, now from opposition becoming a miniature cascade, and now flowing on smoothly and placidly, its surface only stirred by ripples of laughter if any one present were equal to the calling it forth.

Thus, in answer to the last remark made by Mr. H., Mrs. F. might naturally say: "How trying it is to talk to deaf people, as so few have mastered lip-reading, although it is a wonderful advantage to deaf people, almost overcoming their infirmity."

D.—"Lip-reading is very well for young people,

but half the old ladies you meet are beyond it, and have to supply its place by the use of the ear-trumpet."

B.—“Yes, it is very disappointing when one’s efforts at wit, humour, or common-sense, have to travel along a four feet tube and an ivory pipe into a dull ear, and after all fail ignominiously in reaching the citadel of thought, and only elicit a grunt. Few sayings bear a second journey; like beer, when poured out, they become flat.”

Miss E.—“One’s best remarks I think are hardly worthy of repetition, and if one had to shout every sentence one uttered into an ear-trumpet, how very little one would be inclined to say.”

G.—“I am afraid, Miss E., you have not appreciated our conversational efforts this evening, and are kind enough to let us know it, and I can also understand why we have been favoured with so little from you. You scarcely do yourself justice, and charming as it is to look at you at all times, I almost feel inclined to exclaim with the poet, ‘Oh that those lips had language.’”

Miss E.—“The battle is to the strong, and you gentlemen have had the lions’ share of the conversation this evening, and have left us little opportunity for saying the little we have to say, and now you have quite crushed me with your compliments.”

G.—“I did not know they were so heavy. I rather

flattered myself I was ingratiating myself with you. Perhaps you will teach me what to say that might be worthy of you, or rather of us both."

D.—"That is a challenge, Miss E. ; beware how you take it up ; you would find it a difficult task to teach him anything. There is very little that he does not know, let me tell you."

G.—"It is too bad of you, D., to show me up in this way. I was about to persuade Miss E. to take me in hand, now you have destroyed her confidence in a very promising pupil."

Miss E.—"My confidence has not been destroyed, because it has never been given, and Mr. G. is much too advanced to learn of me. I prefer beginners, there is no fear then of the pupil outstripping the master."

D.—"Here is a chance for you, H., not to be lost. Miss E. likes a beginner, as you hear, you would be new ground for her to break."

H.—"You are very obliging in trying to interest Miss E. in my unworthy self, but I am afraid she will hardly thank you for your selection, and I, knowing the toughness of the materials that she would have to work upon, can hardly applaud your choice of a subject."

Mrs. F.—"Are you then so very unimpressionable, Mr. H. ; have you ever given your stoicism a fair trial ; in my experience of men, I have frequently observed that those who believe most in themselves

are the soonest to succumb: continuous sunshine dissolves the hardest frost, combined with a certain amount of warmth in the atmosphere."

G.—"You will not succeed, Mrs. F., in extracting anything on this head from H.; he is as impenetrable as he is impervious."

Bardinage, however good-natured, if persisted in beyond a certain limit, not unfrequently develops into unpleasant personalities; therefore, the greatest good humour, consideration, and delicacy of feeling should be exercised when indulging in it; and the weak point in the character of any individual should in no case be ruthlessly or mercilessly exposed, or held up to ridicule under the guise of badinage.

Bardinage, repartee, and humour, are as sparkling wines to a dinner, and without a *souffçon* of these qualities a dinner party is likely to be voted a somewhat *triste* affair. Many a man who aspires to being considered a wit, prepares his witticisms or puns beforehand, and lets them off when opportunity offers, and if the opportunity is not forthcoming, he generally creates it for himself; other men, again, have a ready wit, which serves them at every turn of the conversation. They are always ready with a sparkling repartee or a witty rejoinder, and are equal to the capping of any joke; the difference between the two men being that the good spirits of the one serve to keep the company amused during the whole of dinner, although nothing

particularly good or worth the remembering may have been said by him, while the witticisms of the other are probably worthy of being remembered and repeated on subsequent or similar occasions.

CHAPTER V.

POSSIBLE "SMALL TALK" UNDER PROBABLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

AT five o'clock teas and afternoon parties, the babble of talk runs high, not society small talk alone, but very much that may be termed intimate and friendly converse, or sociable chat, and conversation of this character taking place between friends, who have much in common, and many mutual interests, is outside the question of small talk. It is at this description of gathering, that those who are intimate, discuss everything that concerns themselves and each other, if not the affairs of the world at large, and no effort is needed on their part either to commence, sustain, or prolong a conversation; on the contrary, the difficulty with them is rather to stem the torrent, and to condense what they would say to their many intimates, within the limits of the time to which their visit is perhaps necessarily limited. Those who are dependent upon small talk at these entertainments, by reason of being but slightly acquainted,

find that here it comes easier to them than elsewhere; for one thing, there is so much to suggest and to supply a range of topics suitable for the making of small talk. Then, again, there is the confidence that a crowd always engenders in those who are nervous, shy, or retiring in manner or disposition. Then, too, the conversation is not a long *tête-à-tête*, as at a dinner party or at a morning call, but is oftener more general than not, three or four ladies and one gentleman carrying on, perhaps, a desultory conversation, made up of odds and ends of talk, a scrap from each as they think fit. But the crowning point of ease and satisfaction to both man and woman at these afternoon teas, is the knowledge that at any moment they can beat a retreat, should they find that they are getting out of their depth, or that their conversational powers are not equal to the occasion, or that they have exerted them to the utmost, or that they are not getting on particularly well, or that they are feeling rather bored, or that they "have had enough of it," as they term it. A sure escape thus ready to hand gives, or imparts, an assurance and confidence, unknown at other social gatherings, where the hours of arrival and departure are more strictly defined.

The materials for making small talk at these afternoon parties are abundant and luxuriant; music being perhaps the chief feature, instrumental and

vocal, comprising professional and amateur talent ranging from the classical to the comic. Performing dogs, performing birds, and performing monkeys, take their part in the amusing of the company, at various times and places, and it would be a poor intelligence that could not out of "the wealth of resources" forthcoming at these entertainments, extract a liberal supply of fashionable babble or ordinary small talk; the small talk of a higher order than that suggested by the general surroundings being rarely looked for or expected at afternoon parties, from those attending them. When general conversation is entered upon, say between four or five people composing a little group, a comment from each suffices to sustain and carry it on, and the merest trifle equally suffices to provoke it.

Thus some one would remark: "That was a German song, was it not? Are you well up in that language?"

To which the reply might be: "Well, I am sorry to say no; I can read it pretty well, but that is all; my sister is a very good German scholar, are you not, Augusta?"

Augusta would say: "I suppose I am; but then you know I spent so much time in Germany."

"Oh, that is a great advantage," would add a third, joining in the conversation. "I don't think one ever thoroughly masters a language unless one

acquires it abroad ;" to which a fourth might reply :

" Do you think so ? my idea is, that it is easiest to acquire a language in early childhood when the mind is impressionable, and the memory retentive." A fifth listening to the foregoing comments, might say :

" That may be the case where great talent for languages exists ; but not otherwise ;" and so on in the same strain, each member of the group throwing in his or her remark, a well-timed remark being the one thing to aim at ; alluding to a performance just completed, one of a group would perhaps observe :

" What a fine voice Madlle. D. has ; have you ever heard her before ?"

" Oh, very often ; she attends a good many of these parties, I fancy. I think I pretty well know the extent of her *répertoire*."

Or, " I suppose one ought not to talk while the music is going on, but I should like to tell you a story I heard the other day."

" Oh, please do, I should so like to hear it," would be the most flattering rejoinder under the circumstances.

" Well, you know Madame B. is furious if people talk when she is singing, and one day last week when she was singing at the C—s', there was so much talking going on, that when she and two Italian signori

were half way through a trio, they left off abruptly, in the middle of a fine passage, to find every one talking at once. One old lady was heard to say, that 'she always had hers fried in lard.' Every one was amused, as you may imagine."

"Well, if you make me laugh now, we shall have a repetition of your story this afternoon, with you and I for the culprits; but if we do, I shall declare that you are the delinquent."

"But suppose I were ungallant enough to denounce you as my accomplice, so that we had to receive our sentence together."

"Well, if you did that, I hope I should be recommended to mercy on the ground of being guilty without intent."

"That is the way with all ladies, they draw a fellow on, and then turn round upon him."

"Only in self-defence; one must do that, you know, in one's poor little weak way."

"Weak, oh, I like that! now you take refuge in the privileges of your sex."

"What do you call the privileges of our sex, I should rather like to know?"

"If you don't know, you must not expect me to tell you; you are too strong as it is, we have no chance with you—none."

"You are too amusing. I really must not let you talk so much."

And this weak kind of badinage is perhaps preferable to "gossip" about one's acquaintances, "gossip" which too often trenches upon the border-land of scandal, and in the carrying on of the former little art and less effort is needed, readiness of reply being the chief ingredient in its composition.

The small talk of the tea-room does not often soar above this calibre—

"May I take you down to have some tea?" or, "Perhaps you would like some tea?" or, "There is tea going on downstairs if you would like some;" or, "People seem to be going down to the tea-room; shall we go down too?" or, "I wish you would let me get you some tea;" or, "Will you have any tea, or an ice, or anything?" or, "Have you had some tea? Let me take you to have some tea," &c.

Such phrases as these are usually made use of when proffering this kind of civility; and, as the stay in the tea-room is of so short a duration,* the "small talk" indulged in is necessarily of the most desultory character.

At garden parties the making of small talk is also greatly facilitated by the surroundings as well as by the amusements provided, and not a little by the liberty of action and the freedom afforded by being able to stroll about from point to point, and not

* See "Manners and Tone of Good Society."

being compelled to remain stationary in one particular spot, besides which garden party amusements are a prolific theme for the construction of small talk. Lawn tennis, archery, cricket, boating, &c., are all so suggestive of small talk that the most diffident of girls and the shyest of boys can hardly be at a loss for a subject to talk about. Therefore, to men and women, it would be almost superfluous to offer any further advice.

At "at homes" or receptions the aids to conversation, furnished by the surroundings, are not so prolific or help-giving ; and at these evening entertainments even music is not always forthcoming. Thus there is no ready-made topic at command, and consequently the conversational powers of the guests are put to a higher test. But here, as elsewhere, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth," and how goodly a structure and how noble a pile may be reared on the shiest and shallowest of foundations. The oft-referred-to illustration of throwing a stone into a stream is aptly illustrative of the widening and extending of circles of conversation from one small centre. The originating of clever remarks is not necessary to the commencing what may ultimately prove to be very entertaining talk, and from the feeblest start the most brilliant ideas may be evolved. Indeed, it would be rather pedantic or eccentric than not to throw a conversational shell in the way of a

startlingly clever observation or to start a proposition, or to put a question of so original a character as almost to shock conventional prejudices. To ask a young lady brusquely or abruptly whether she would rather be wicked or vulgar? would preclude an ordinary young lady from giving any reply whatever. Propositions and remarks of this calibre are a trifle too unconventional to be quite appreciated by the world in general, and the perpetrator of them would be rather looked upon as an "odd man" than as an amusing one. Amusing people find that sometimes overmuch is expected of them: they have a reputation for being amusing, and this reputation is apt to overweight them. They are, in a measure, dependent upon circumstances and surroundings for the display of their powers of being amusing, and if the time, place, or company are not in harmony for such a display, the strain is too acutely felt to permit of their making anything like a successful effort. The very fact of being told to say "something amusing" by appreciative friends, is a challenge that few are capable of taking up with any degree of spirit. But ordinary people, when they happen to know a man or woman claiming to be considered amusing, at once imagine that amusing sayings can be called up by them at any given moment, and are proportionately surprised when the charm of such invocations as these fail to work.

“ We want you to come and be amusing ; ” or, “ I told Mrs. A. you were so amusing, I want her to hear how amusing you can be ; ” or, “ You are not at all amusing to-day, and you were so very amusing when I met you at the B.s last night. I so wish you would say something to make us laugh now ; ” or irritating remarks of this order.

At “ at homes,” when the host or hostess introduces strangers to each other, a trying, awkward ten minutes occasionally follows to those not well versed in the art of small talk, which art, if they were but proficient in it, would be unto them as a “ tower of strength.”

“ Why don’t you sit down ? Let me find you a seat somewhere. Don’t you hate a crowd ? ” might remark a man, thoroughly at his ease.

“ No, not at all. I like to see a room full of people. It looks as if one’s invitations were appreciated,” would answer a lady not a novice in the art of small talk.

“ I am afraid that your view of a crowd is not an impartial one. You are evidently looking at it from a hostess’s point of view. What an idea you ladies have of making every question a home one.”

“ I don’t know that we do particularly. You object to a crowd, you say, and, perhaps, if you come to my ‘at home,’ next Tuesday, and there should be no crowd, only a very few people in the rooms, and no one

on the staircase, you would probably shrug your shoulders, and go away, saying to yourself, that there was 'no one there,' and what an unpopular woman I must be."

"Then you wish to prove that crowded rooms signify the popularity of the hostess, or the reverse? I never looked at it from this point of view, but, perhaps, you are right, and a crowd does mean popularity; in that case I must expect not to get further than your entrance-hall on Tuesday night, and that the staircase will be quite impassable."

"That is a rather far-fetched compliment. I hope you will not be daunted by a crowd when the question of seeing me is concerned, but you need not be alarmed, you will not find my rooms over-crowded, as I have only asked a few people."

When a conversation of this character has arrived at some such point as this, it would be unwise to continue longer in the same strain, the subject being hardly strong enough to warrant it, unless a practical turn is given to it, by the subject of over-crowded rooms being gone into, together with the best modes of ventilation and the proper number of guests that could be accommodated within a given space; otherwise, it should be diverted into a fresh channel in some such way as this:—

"Is this the first entertainment of the sort you have given in your new house?"

"No, indeed. I asked you to a party we gave in

the beginning of May, and you were out of town, I think, or something."

"Something! why, I was laid up all May, and was not able to go anywhere; and when you have been compelled to give up society for a time, it is surprising how difficult it is to get into harness again."

"Do you mean that people forget to send invitations, or that you don't care to accept those you receive?"

"A little of one and very much of the other; I confess that the routine society imposes upon one, jars, when one feels slightly out of gear; there seems such a sameness and aimlessness about the whole thing, that one begins to ask one's self, whether it is not after all but a huge mistake."

"You are getting quite morbid. Society is well enough in its way; I should not attempt to set the world right, if I were you, but make the best of things as they are: that is my philosophy."

"That is an easy going view to take of things, but it is not very high ground to go upon."

If the lady conversing were desirous of pursuing the conversation as to whether and in what way it were women's mission to do her best towards elevating the tone of society, and of remodelling various of the laws by which it is governed, she would have but to put some leading remark to draw forth her companion's views, and of stating her own ideas and convictions; but

if not desirous of continuing it, she would skilfully lead it into another groove, although starting, perhaps, from the last remark—

“High ground, perhaps not, but I like to be sure of my ground, and always to avoid dangerous ground if I can, treading on people’s prejudices, and so on, but one often says the wrong thing, I find.”

“Crotchety people and thin-skinned people are always difficult to get on with, and one cannot help rubbing them up the wrong way.”

“I think thin-skinned people, or people whose vanity and self-love are always on the *qui vive* for a slight or a wound are so much more trying than people with a crotchet; one can humour the crotchet, apart from the individual.”

“I am afraid that there is more theory than practice in what you say. I did not observe that you were particularly inclined to humour either my crotchet or myself, just now.”

“Oh, that is quite different; it would not be good for you if I did either.”

“How do you know? suppose you try it just for once.”

A little badinage, interspersed with common sense, gives conversation of even an ordinary character a brightness and sparkle, a dash of colour, as it were, taking from it an over-due amount of ponderosity, not to say pedantry, or “tall talk,”

which latter is the opposite of "small talk;" tall talk, as understood by the many, is an undesirable accomplishment or possession; we take it to mean inflated language devoid of wit and humour, with but a dilution of sense and meaning, it may be handicapped with "fine writing," in racing parlance, "there being very little between them." Clever people naturally adapt their conversation to the idiosyncrasies of those with whom they are conversing, and badinage is as much out of place with some people as is the idealistic with others. The profession or pursuits of an individual should always be taken into account when opening a conversation; at least this rule holds good between acquaintances, while friends usually follow it from personal inclination and warm interest. It is always gratifying to an individual to converse on those topics with which he is most familiar and which he has most at heart; therefore, his calling, profession, or pursuits, obviously offer a direct road to conversation. "Where are you quartered just now?" might be a useful lead if addressed to a young man bearing Her Majesty's commission in a cavalry or a line regiment, outside the Household Brigade, and upon his saying where he was quartered and how he liked the place, the next observation would probably be, "Is there much going on there, and are there many pleasant people in the neighbourhood?" and, if a society man, he would

at once enter upon the subject with much explicitness as to the people and amusements of the place; if not a society man, he might say something to the effect, that "He did not know much about it himself, as he did not care for the sort of thing; but that there were two fellows in the regiment who did all the going out, in the dancing and garden party way."

"Only two! what becomes of all the others?" queries a vivacious lady.

"Well, we are not very strong as to officers, only half the regiment is with us, and B. and C. are the only fellows that care for dances and garden parties."

"Indeed, then, it is to be hoped that the two officers who represent the regiment do it credit?"

"Oh yes, they are picked men, quite ladies' men."

"Then I don't think I should like them; I hate what are called ladies' men, they are such nonentities."

"That is a very sweeping assertion; you ladies are answerable for the existence of the class. Men become 'ladies' men' to please you, *et puis* you affect to despise them."

"Oh, they do not become ladies' men to please us, but merely to please themselves—it is, I should say, with them but a question of vanity as to how much notice and how much spoiling they can obtain from the ladies."

"You are very severe; I don't profess to be a lady's man myself, but I know some very good fellows

who are great favourites with the ladies, and with their own sex also, and who can do things a little better than most men."

"Ah, that is a different thing altogether, a 'different man'; I was thinking of those men one meets sometimes, mere dolls, I call them, and who fritter away their lives in ladies' drawing-rooms—who play a little, sing a little, paint a little, and so on, and who talk a certain sort of jargon under the impression that they are talking high art."

"I suppose you ladies encourage this sort of thing in this sort of man, or he would not be so much to the front."

"I don't know about his being so much to the front, as you say, but a man who can sing really well, and who is always good-natured and unaffected about singing when he is asked, is, of course, a favourite wherever he goes—he is such an acquisition."

"There it is; a man is good-natured and unspoilt, and you ladies at once begin to spoil him, and then turn round upon him, when he becomes conceited, which he is sure to do if you give him time and plenty of adulation. A fellow is only human, after all, and he can only stand a certain amount of spoiling."

"What degree of spoiling do you think men can stand at the hands of ladies, and how long does it take to make a really pleasant man conceited and ~~foolish~~?"

“ It depends very much upon the sort of man he is : I am not qualified to give an opinion on the matter, never having been put to the test, and perhaps I should not stand it better than other men if I were ; one can’t say.”

“ Perhaps you do not care for ladies, and prefer the company of your own sex ? ”

“ Oh, I like ladies well enough, but I like them in their place, I don’t want to be always dancing attendance upon them ; one need not go to extremes, and one is not obliged to dislike ladies even if one is not a lady’s man.”

“ I begin to believe you rather like them than not, or have liked them at some time of your life, and are now a blighted being, suffering from unrequited affection, and so on.”

“ I am afraid not ; I should be an interesting study to you if I were, perhaps ; but I am not a sufferer from the tender passion, though I do not altogether disbelieve in it ; how can I, when the best-hearted fellow I ever met died, I am told, from its effects but the other day ? how far it was love, or how far it was lungs, no one seemed to know. I conclude it was the one reacting upon the other, the illness caused by the lungs, and the depression caused by the love, and that the two combined were too much for him.”

“ What a very sad story. I did not give your sex

credit for feeling things so deeply ; one hears now and then of a woman breaking her heart for a man, but a man—hardly ever."

" You must take for granted that 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' "

" I quite believe it ; there is very much on earth even that one does not half understand, and from which spiritualists would have us believe that they can partially lift the veil."

" Oh, spiritualism takes great hold upon you ladies. I am aware you are so impressionable, and have such nervous organizations, that this kind of thing would naturally appeal to you ; the weird, and the supernatural, and the marvellous, have from earliest childhood a fascination for your sex."

" Very true, but it is not only women who have a leaning towards spiritualism ; I have met a great many men who have a strong bias in that direction. I have hardly yet made up my mind whether spiritualism be an uncanny science or whether it is simply 'a dallying with wrong that does no harm.' "

" Yes, one hears some curious and, I confess, startling things from enthusiastic spiritualists. A man said at dinner the other night that he could see three spirits behind my back—skeletons—and that if a spiritualist had been present, he could have photographed them. I expect we, many of us, have a

skeleton or two of our own in the cupboard, and the cupboard is certainly the best place for them; anyhow, we don't want them at our backs when we are eating our dinner."

"I am quite sure it is not a subject to joke upon; there is, I think, a great deal of deception and trickery going on among spiritual mediums as every one knows from the exposures that have taken place, but at the same time there is very much that is unexplainable, or unexplained."

A conversation which had thus strayed from subject to subject until it had reached some such point as this, could be continued *ad infinitum*, or directed to some other point, say in this way—

"And you ladies like to have everything explained. Has not curiosity something to do with this desire of getting at the bottom of things?"

"I think of all retorts the *tu quoque* is the weakest, but I have often found men absurdly curious about trifles."

"You must not call that curiosity, you must call it interest."

"Oh, I see; then what is curiosity in woman, is interest in man. I admire the distinction and the definition."

Dialogues carried on in this strain afford an opportunity of hearing other people's opinions as well as of stating one's own, and of having the rough

edges of one's prejudices filed, or of one's views being in a measure enlarged if directed to subjects of general interest.

Supposing the calling of an individual to be that of the law, and the one about to converse with him had no certain ground to go upon beyond the knowledge that such was his profession, the subject started with him should be one on which he might be expected to be thoroughly *au fait*. The studying and having a regard to the profession and pursuits of individuals with whom one comes in contact in society is not to be confounded with that rather objectionable practice of perpetually talking "shop," as this class of talk is slangily and vulgarly termed. To refer to the proclivities of a legal gentleman, either he himself, or the one conversing with him, would, if at a loss for a suitable topic, allude or touch upon some prominent case of interest somewhat in this way:—

"I see the so and so case is settled; I have not read the trial, it seems to have been a complicated one. Had you anything to do with it, or were you interested in it at all?"

To which the reply might be—

"Not personally; a man I know very well was one of the counsel for the prosecution, and he never had a shadow of a doubt as to which way it would go."

"How clever you legal men are! You seem to arrive at the pith of everything by intuition."

“Intuition, my dear lady! say rather facts and a certain power of making deductions therefrom.”

“From facts you jump at conclusions, I suppose?”

“I hope not, we should probably jump very wide of the mark, if we did.”

“Oh, I don’t know, I think one can generally trust to one’s instinct in forming a conclusion; at least, I generally find that if I endeavour to reason away any first impression or idea, and so set it on one side, I am sure afterwards to regret having done so.”

“Accident favours your first impressions perhaps; and the general charge against you ladies is that you *do* act from impulse, and decline to make use of your reasoning powers.”

“Ah, then I suppose you admire those strong-minded women, who can reason with you by the hour, and who speak from platforms and advocate women’s suffrage.”

“Not at all; I do not approve of women stepping out of their sphere into public life—woman’s best claim upon man is her weakness, it is in reality her strength; when she places herself on an equality with him, she throws down this shield and takes up the gauntlet, the battle is then to the strong, and a woman fighting on her own merits alone, and without the usual allowances made to the weaker vessel, would soon find herself put *hors de combat*.”

“ You do not like clever women then ? ”

“ Indeed, I do, very much, and I know several very talented, accomplished, and clever women, I am happy to say ; but they are quite distinct from those women who take up an idea, or a hobby, and ride it to the death in print and out of it.”

“ Riding a hobby may be pleasant exercise enough to the equestrian well mounted, but it is not so agreeable to the pedestrians who are ridden over by these riders. Many people have hobbies, though, whether they are aware of it or not ; and I really am aware of having a hobby of my own.”

“ Pray don’t tell me about it if you have ; I have neither energy nor heart to oppose you, and, perhaps, I should not be justified in encouraging you.”

“ I ought not to call it a hobby. I have unnecessarily alarmed you. I was only going to say I take a great interest in——”

“ I see, you will tell me—a great interest in what ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t think I will tell you now, I have changed my mind ; you would not care about it, as you say.”

“ Pray tell me what it is. If I can be of any use to you, or if you want any advice, I shall be very glad to give it you.”

“ Thank you very much, I will accept the promise, and you must redeem it another time.”

And at this stage of some such conversation as the

foregoing, a new theme might be originated, or the dialogue continued in the same strain, a word, sometimes sufficing to give it another range or outlet.

Politics, with the generality of men, are a strong point, and when this is so, they are always amenable to a conversational lead on the subject ; but it is one that should be broached with caution, and a feeler might be dexterously thrown out before hazarding an opinion, to avoid running counter to any strong political bias, which, where it exists, is often strongly felt, and still more strongly expressed. A false start on this head often occasions a loss of ground which is difficult to recover.

Mrs. A. might commence a conversation of this nature with—

“I thought the two best speeches last night on the —— question were made by Sir Henry D—— and Mr. E——”.*

Mr. B.—“Oh, Mr. E.’s speech was by far the best of the two ; his way of putting the case was so clear and concise, he took all the wind out of Sir Henry’s sails.”

A man loses very little time in making the nature of his political opinions thoroughly understood. If the one conversing with him be of the same way of thinking, the conversation would doubtless consist

* Naming the two prominent men on the Ministerial and Opposition benches who had spoken on any particular question.

of an harmonious duet of eulogies on the leader and members of their party, but if the contrary were the case, and opposite views were entertained, the most moderate manner of stating them would be the most conciliatory and would prevent the conversation degenerating into a series of assertions and contradictions. In the case of a lady being the oppositionist, she should rather convey the idea that she was open to conviction and to conversion, as by this means she would gracefully lead her companion on to a further exposition of his political principles, throwing the reins of conversation into his hands, and allowing him a clear course for an agreeable canter.

Mrs. A.—“I am rather an admirer of Sir Henry. I think him very clever; besides, he is a great friend of mine, so perhaps you will say I am prejudiced in his favour.”

B.—“I should think you very likely were; I have heard he is a pleasant fellow, and quite knows what to say to the ladies.”

Mrs. A.—“Oh, but he is very amusing, and that is one of the reasons why he is so popular.”

B.—“What do you call being amusing? joking, punning, or laughing at his own stories?”

Mrs. A.—“Oh, not the being a punster, certainly. A man who strains and distorts a word that he may arrive at a pun, and expects you to laugh when you fail to see the joke, is to me the reverse of amusing.”

B.—“Some people are so devoid of humour, that they cannot see the point of any story, or the pith of any joke ; while others, a little less dense, discover it for themselves probably half an hour after it has been perpetrated.”

Mrs. A., who declines to acknowledge the sarcasm as levelled at herself, even if she has observed it, continues amiable. (This continuing a conversation blandly in the face of occasional dry retorts, disarms further attacks, and is a skilful line of tactics to pursue under such circumstances ; to “cut up rough,” to use a homely expression, would be an exhibition of weakness, and by no means politic.)

Mrs. A.—“Yes, I know the sort of people you mean ; they suddenly laugh aloud when everyone else is a long way ahead of the pleasantry, and one looks round in surprise to discover the cause of this isolated merriment.”

B.—“You are right ; to see a man laughing apropos of nothing, as one thinks, gives one the idea that he is a little wrong in his head.” When a laugh is going on provoked by something that is being said, those not near enough to have caught the *bon mot*, or who, if they have caught it, have not seen the drift of it through ignorance of the cause from which it arose, always feel annoyed or aggrieved, more or less, as if an injury had been done them, and usually say, rather testily, “May I ask

what is the joke?" and if it be repeated for their benefit, although mollified and appeased, they rarely condescend to laugh, perhaps because the contagion of general laughter is lacking; consequently a joke or witticism which in the first instance was thought good enough to provoke a hearty laugh, on the second hearing is discovered to be but a poor one after all.

Mrs. A.—"Laughter, hearty, merry laughter, is wonderfully contagious, certainly. I think there is a great deal in a laugh, I mean a natural, musical, genuine laugh; what a pleasant thing it is to hear, and how few people there are who have a really agreeable laugh!"

B.—"Very few, as you say. A boisterous and noisy laugh is odious; there is no heartiness in such mirth; in fact, it is a misnomer to call it so."

Mrs. A.—"I dislike a society laugh almost as much; a sort of forced laugh, with a hollow ring in it."

B.—"It is the kind of laugh one most often hears, though; it is ready for all occasions; it is polite, conciliatory, complimentary, and conventional, and is never objectionable or vulgar, as is the boisterous guffaw."

Mrs. A.—"To me there is a ring of sadness about this stereotyped laugh, the effort of will rather than the offspring of joy, pleasure, or appreciation."

B.—"What a society laugh, as you call it, is

with us men, is with you ladies an 'affected laugh,' something between a simper and a giggle, constructed on fashionable principles to do duty in fashionable circles."

Mrs. A.—"What an unkind comparison; the school-girl giggles, and the young miss simpers, and in your experience of society have the women you know made no advance upon this?"

B.—"The generality of women one meets do not appear to have done so, but rather to have cultivated these mannerisms, and to have grafted the one on to the other. There are women, of course, who are endowed with that precious possession, a low, rippling, musical, joyous laugh; a charming gift in woman, and of the many graces that served to render beautiful and accomplished women famous in their day, this particular gift ranked high, as you know."

Conversation such as this, and which could be carried on by individuals of the most average intelligence, might here be permitted to meander into the reminiscences of the past connected with the feminine world, on or off the stage, through the allusion to popular women—celebrities of a bygone day—or the previous subject, laughs and laughter, might be further pursued, there being many clever things to be said on this particular head, so much so, that it would be hardly expedient to propose such a flight to the mediocre talker for whose benefit, and as an example

of an easy and fluent mode of conversing, this class of conversation is imagined, and to prove how easy it is to weave a sort of average “small talk” out of the merest trifle, and without the smallest perceptible effort.

CHAPTER VI.

“AIRY NOTHINGS OF THE BALL-ROOM.”

BALL-ROOM conversation, or the small talk that does duty for conversation, is proverbially frivolous and inane. It is easy enough to sit down and write a homily upon the frivolous talk of young people in the ball-room, but *que roulez-vous*—if the conversation is frivolous, it is not to be wondered at, seeing that people usually go to a ball with a frivolous intent, namely, to dance, and as the verb to dance is usually conjugated with the verb to flirt, thus, I dance and flirt, he or she dances and flirts, they dance and flirt, anything solid or sensible in the way of conversation is under the circumstances not to be expected; in addition to which two-thirds of the company at an ordinary ball consist of young men and maidens, maidens from seventeen, and young men from eighteen, whose one idea it is to dance, and who have no thought or care about making themselves agreeable from a conversational point of view, considering, if they consider at all, that if they are good dancers, their partners ought to be thoroughly satisfied, which view of things is fairly

correct ; the young people are thoroughly satisfied with each other, they talk up to each other's level when they do talk, and they are always extremely polite, and make use of the most stereotyped sentences, which are very proper and suitable to the occasion, but the young lady and the young gentleman who attempt to conjugate the one verb with the other, travel far beyond these ball-room platitudes.

A young gentleman desirous of dancing with a young lady to whom he has been introduced, says with a certain self-possession of manner : " Will you give me a dance ? " or " What dance may I have ? " Formerly it was the fashion for the young man to say : " May I have the pleasure of dancing with you ? " but the youth of the present day adopts a much more familiar style of address, and if ever so slightly acquainted with the young lady, he assumes a pleading tone when asking her to dance, and says : " I hope you have kept a dance for me," or " May I not dance something with you ? " or " Won't you spare me a dance ? " or more familiarly still he says, " Will you dance this ? " or " Shall we take a turn ? " The " Are you engaged for this dance ? " although not so familiar, is a very general formula at London balls, or at balls where it is considered unfashionable to use programmes.

To these different "*invitations à la valse*," a young lady no longer answers, " I shall be very happy."

This phrase has disappeared in company with "May I have the pleasure?" and the young lady of to-day replies very practically, accordingly as to whether the applicant is in favour or not. "Certainly, I am not engaged for number five, nine, or thirteen," or "I am afraid I have not one to spare except number fourteen, a quadrille," or "I will give you a dance if you will come for it a little later, I am engaged for the next three dances," or "Thank you, yes." To the question of "Are you engaged for this dance?" some foolish maidens reply that they do not think that they are engaged, at the same time being thoroughly aware that they are not, and the young men also are aware that the maidens are finessing, and averse to making the direct admission that they are in want of partners. A young lady with tact and aplomb escapes from this dilemma by replying with great readiness to this question, "I am very glad to say that I am not," which rejoinder is flattering to the young gentleman, giving him the impression that the young lady could have been engaged for this dance had she so pleased, but that she greatly preferred waiting for the chance of his asking her to dance; she may or may not have been actuated by this hope, but if by some expression of pleasure at not being engaged for the dance which is at the moment asked for, she puts her partner on good terms with herself and himself; it argues well for her success in the ball-room.

Those elderly maiden ladies who shake their heads over what they term the vapid and silly conversation heard in the ball-room, should endeavour to recall the days of their youth, and to recollect whether the active exercise of dancing was conducive to anything but the most desultory of observations, disjointed sentences, questions and answers.

The small talk of the ball-room does not and is not expected to soar above polite commonplaces relative to the occasion. The materials for the making of small talk which the ball-room itself supplies are decidedly limited, and if enumerated, might be summed up thus: the band, the flowers, the floor, and later on the supper; commonplace people perpetually go the round and ring the changes upon these with but very little variation in the phrasing of the sentences which they deliver at different times during the evening; phrases such as these, for instance, "What a good band it is;" "How well the band plays;" "It is a capital band;" "What a good ball this is;" "This is a very full ball;" "This is a better ball than it was last year;" "This is not such a good ball as it was last year;" "What a good floor it is;" "I think the floor is very good;" "Don't you find the floor very slippery;" "How pretty the flowers look;" "The flowers are very pretty, are they not?" "I think the flowers are so pretty, don't you?" The frequent repetition of these statements is apt to pall upon the hearer, the slight

difference in the construction of each sentence hardly offering sufficient variety to render it more palatable after perhaps the tenth time of hearing. Leaving these topics to those who cannot conveniently get on without them, it is advisable to branch away from them in any direction, even if compelled to start with them through the pertinacity of a partner. Again, when men well over thirty are amongst the energetic waltzers, they generally find themselves talking down to the level of their young lady partners, and are apparently content with the responses their questions extract, which questions generally take the form of "Have you been to many balls this season?" to which the answer would probably be, "No, I have not been to many balls yet;" and if a country young lady, she would doubtless add, "That she is going to one next week." The next interrogation would perhaps be, "I suppose you are very fond of dancing?" to which the reply would be, "Yes, I am, very." A series of questions and answers up to this mark will last out a dance, unless a young lady possesses sufficient animation and *esprit* to prove to her partner that she is not quite so insipid as he had supposed, in which case he would desist from this mild form of questioning and take a rather higher flight, not too high a one, lest he should alarm her, and cause her to consider him eccentric; neither would she fly too high, for fear of his afterwards speaking of her as "a very odd

girl." Thus a young lady, when asked if she were fond of dancing, would perhaps say, "I like it very well, but there are many things I like quite as much," this would give her partner an opening for inquiring as to what amusements pleased and interested her other than that of dancing, when similarity of tastes might be discovered and congenial ideas developed.

Affirmatives and negatives close the avenues of talk leading to nothing and nowhere. When this form of reply is necessary, it should at least be qualified by some additional remark which might possibly prove a handle for further discourse. The "Yes I am," and "No, I am not;" "Yes, it is;" or "No, it is not;" or the "Yes, I do;" or the "No, I do not;" or the "Yes, I think so;" or "No, I think not," form of replies are as chilling as they are brief, and offer little or no encouragement for the making of further conversational efforts. Any of these replies taken singly, and qualified even in an interrogative form, would be an improvement upon the uncompromising egotistical affirmative or negative. Thus, to "Yes, I think so," might be added, "What do *you* think about it; you have not told me as yet?" In place of a decided "No, I am not," it would be less formal and altogether more pliant and pleasant were the reply to be, "I do not think I am, very. Do you care about it much?" thus drawing out an opinion in place of putting an end to the subject by a cold assertion.

Conversation which takes place between married ladies who dance, and gentlemen with whom they dance, is usually of too friendly and intimate a character to be denominated small talk, but even were it otherwise, the small talk requisite for the occasion would naturally be made through the channels of mutual associations, and mutual friends, which remark equally applies to the conversation that takes place between elderly ladies and their contemporaries, the patrons and patronesses of a ball ; they also have too much common ground to go upon to need the aid of extraneous small talk, save under exceptional circumstances, when it could be readily called to the rescue.

Ball-room introductions are a great feature at a ball. The manner of making introductions has been already described in a former work ;* but, it has already been said, the asking a favour or the making a request is not what is understood by small talk, while the conversation which follows the introduction is genuine small talk.

The ball-room is essentially the place where complimentary nothings are airily uttered and blandly received, nothings of this calibre for example, "This is our dance, I think," remarks a gentleman gallantly offering his arm to a lady, " You are not afraid of my being able to pilot you through this crowd, are you ?" If the lady replies to this speech by an unqualified

negative of "No, not at all," the gentleman would be under the necessity of casting about for another opening, but if on the contrary she were to say, "No, I shall believe in you until you prove that my confidence is misplaced," a young man, on so graceful an admission, could only say "That he was proud of the trust reposed in him;" and "That he considered himself put upon his trial, as it were;" and "That he was confident of being able to steer his fair partner safely through the crowded ball-room."

Complimentary speeches and airy nothings differ from legitimate topics of conversation, and do not admit of much strain being put upon them; if continued beyond the moment, they come dangerously near the region of flirtation, and failing this, they become flat or insipid, all the sparkling effervescence having evaporated. Thus, were a lady in the pauses of the waltz, to return to the charge by complimenting her partner on his cleverness in steering her through the crowd, the remark would lose its point, and her partner would consider the speech fulsome and the lady tiresome. If he wished for a compliment on his performance, he would solicit such when the dance was over, when anything flattering a lady had to say would be listened to with supreme satisfaction. If a lady discovers that her partner is a good waltzer, a neat way of complimenting him would be to throw out the suggestion that he had probably been much abroad. Thus she would

say, "I suppose you have been some time in Germany, have you not?" to which he would retort, if it were the case, "How did you guess that?" or if it were not the case, he would say, "No, indeed, why did you think so?" Then would be the moment for the making of the compliment after some such fashion as this: "Anyone who has been much abroad, I find generally waltzes so well, so I thought you must have been in Germany for some little time." This would give a man a line which he might safely follow, whether he had experiences of his residence on the Continent to relate, or the how he came to be so great an adept in the art of waltzing.

If, as is sometimes the case, a lady finds that her partner's dancing does not realize her expectations, a polite way of making this opinion known to him so as to avoid wounding his *amour propre*, would be for her to say: "I am afraid I am not dancing your step; we do not seem to get on well, do we?" or "If you do not mind, I think I should like to sit down, I would rather not take another turn just yet;" or she might say, "What step do you dance? I do not seem to have fallen into your step yet?" whereupon the young man would gallantly declare that he was in fault, and if a very young man, and very determined to dance with the young lady, he would express a wish to be told or taught her step.

The broad and airy compliments which men of a

certain standing consider themselves privileged to pay to young ladies, are not to be paid indiscriminately by ordinary mortals, the right of so doing belonging to those men who have a recognised reputation for this style of persiflage, and whose light badinage is taken at its real value, gallantry and admiration of the sex, rather than individual preference being its motive power. This flowery style of address which comes so glibly from the lips of these society men, is slightly disconcerting to those youthful maidens and young matrons who are lacking in the spirit of repartee, and who are too matter-of-fact to attempt a witty rejoinder, by turning the tables with a *tu quoque* style of compliment, this feat not being a very general accomplishment amongst young ladies, whose artless questions often provoke a labyrinth of pretty speeches. To such a feeble remark from a young lady as, "How well the rooms are lighted," the flood-gates of flowery rhetoric might be opened by a flowery gentleman thus: "Yes, by the light of beauty's eyes, and you are lending your share, which is not a small one, to the general illumination, the brilliancy of which is almost too dazzling to a poor mortal like myself, to whom it is well that moments such as these are brief, else the reaction would be destructive to my peace of mind, if not altogether fatal to it." If, in answer to the above, a young lady were to remark smilingly, "How absurd you are," or if she were to laugh, being amused, but

not knowing exactly what to say, she would feel vexed with herself at not being able to rally him, and he would have but a poor idea of her intelligence and quickness of perception, but if she were able to parry his attack with any degree of spirit, he would respect her cleverness accordingly, and continue to provoke a further display of it, and the lady's retort would be very much after this fashion :

"I thought you were looking a little pale and overcome, the effect of this blaze of beauty as you say. Which particular lamp or candle would you like to have extinguished, and am I a big coloured lamp, a wax candle, or a gas jet ?" the answer would probably be to the effect, "That she might consider herself whichever she pleased, an alabaster lamp with a blue shade over it, or a transparent wax candle."

Personal attire and the ornaments worn provoke much light banter in the ball-room in this wise : "I envy that butterfly perched so daintily on your hair close to that shell-like ear. What secrets would I not whisper were I so near. Happy butterfly !" The rejoinder might be made in the same spirit of fun. "The butterfly is not so happy as you think ; I shut it up in a velvet case when I go home for fear of losing it. Now one could not shut you up, and you would not like it even if one could." Or the retort might be, "Unlike you, my butterfly has no feeling, so it does not appreciate its happiness, which is, I believe, cha-

racteristic of butterflies ; *you* ought to know something about it." Here the rallying answer might be :

" You are kind enough to anticipate my future ; I have not found my wings as yet, I am still in a chrysalis state." A lady desirous of having the last word, might be tempted to say, " Then you are safer to hold if not so pretty to keep, so I think on the whole you had better retain your chrysalis condition for the present." .

To envy the roses on a lady's dress, or to tell her that she outvies the beauty of the flowers she wears, are very hackneyed similes, so hackneyed that a young lady can hardly be excused if not found ready with a laughing retort ; and it may be remembered that the strictly practical reply caps with good effect the most poetical or hyperbolical of comparisons, if a rejoinder in the same high-flown strain is not at the moment forthcoming, and with many, such a moment never arrives, while the practical is always within reach and always available.

CHAPTER VII.

“VULGARISMS OF SPEECH.”

CERTAIN words and certain expressions, innocent and inoffensive in themselves, have degenerated into so-called vulgarisms, through constant use and misuse, while others have become vulgarised, suffering from an exaggerated pronunciation. And words which have a stamp of vulgarity, if used in one sense, are restored to their original position when used in another. The misapplication of words is doubtless one of the main reasons of their becoming vulgarised, so to speak; added to which, a word or expression that is constantly in the mouth of all, like a style or make of a garment adopted by all, speedily becomes denominated vulgar or common. Thus, words and expressions are tabooed by general consent, which, had they been allowed but to retain their original place, would never have forfeited their reputation or have fallen into disfavour.

There are many words and expressions which are still on the borderland of vulgarity from the same

cause, and which only require a little further pressure to cause them to join the ranks of the discarded ones, perhaps to be rehabilitated at some future day, and to resume their proper place all the fresher for their enforced rest.

The terms “ladies” and “gentlemen” become in themselves vulgarisms when misapplied; and simple as they are in themselves, yet the improper application of the wrong term at the wrong time—the calling a man “a gentleman” when he should be called “a man,” or speaking of a man as “a man” when he should be spoken of as “a gentleman”; or alluding to a lady as “a woman” when she should be alluded to as “a lady,” or speaking of a woman as “a lady” when she should properly be termed “a woman”—makes all the difference in the world to ears polite. Tact, and a sense of the fitness of things, decide these points, there being no fixed rule to go upon to determine when a man is a man or when he is a gentleman; and, although he is far oftener termed the one than the other, he does not thereby lose his attributes of a gentleman, of being “a man raised above the vulgar, a man of good breeding, a man of extraction, or a man of birth.”

In common parlance a man is always a man to a man, and never a gentleman; to a woman he is occasionally a man and occasionally a gentleman; but a man would far oftener term a woman “a woman”

than he would term her "a lady." When a man makes use of an adjective in speaking of a lady, he almost invariably calls her a woman; thus, he would say, "I met a rather agreeable woman at dinner last night;" but he would not say, "I met an agreeable lady;" but he might say, "A lady, a friend of mine, told me," &c., when he would not say, "A woman, a friend of mine, told me," &c. Again, a man would say, "Which of the ladies did you take in to dinner?" he would certainly not say, "Which of the women," &c.

Speaking of people *en masse*, it would be to belong to the very advanced school to refer to them in conversation as "men and women," while it would be all but vulgar to style them "ladies and gentlemen;" the compromise between the two being to speak of them as "ladies and men;" thus, a lady would say, "I have asked two or three ladies and several men;" she would not say, "I have asked several men and women," neither would she say, "I have asked several ladies and gentlemen." And speaking of numbers, it would be very usual to say, "There were a great many ladies and but very few men present," or, "The ladies were in the majority, so few men being present." Again, a lady would say, "I expect two or three men to dinner," but she would not say, "I expect two or three gentlemen to dine with us." Again, she would say, "Are there

many men here, friends of yours?" she would not say, "Are there many gentlemen here, friends of yours?" When people are on ceremony with each other, they might perhaps in speaking of a man call him "a gentleman," but otherwise it would be more usual to speak of him as "a man." Ladies, when speaking of each other, usually employ the term "woman" in preference to that of "lady." Thus, in speaking of each other they would say, "She is a very good-natured woman," "What sort of a woman is she?" the term "lady" being entirely out of place under such circumstances. Again, the term "young lady" gives place as far as possible to the term "girl," although it greatly depends upon the amount of intimacy existing as to which term is employed.

Amongst the tabooed words, "stylish" and "genteeel" are relegated to the show-room, where they are very much at home in each other's company, although considered decidedly vulgar when met with elsewhere. "Stylish" being bred in the show-room is the right word in the right place, but it is hard upon unfortunate "genteeel," that, conveying in itself so much, it should have met with such a fate. "Nice" bids fair to follow in the footsteps of discarded words; standing alone as an adjective, though *passé*, it still has its admirers, but when to nice is added either "awfully" or "too," then nice is altogether out

of favour. "Jolly" is well enough on the lips of a schoolboy, to whom it now of right belongs, a right which no one disputes; but slang proper is and never can be anything else than vulgar, and those who delight in its use for the embellishment of their speech, to all intents and purposes intend to be vulgar. "If we accommodate ourselves to the vulgar in our speech, why not also in our deportment?"

The peculiar manner in which certain people pronounce certain words under the impression that the doing so is fine and fashionable, is in itself the height of vulgarity. This affectation is not only confined to individuals in private life, but is greatly followed by certain actors and actresses when impersonating fashionable characters in domestic dramas of high life, with whom kind becomes ky-end, cruel becomes cru-ell, dear is no longer dear, but de-ar; and beer changes to bee-ar, sky to ske-ey, quarrel to quar-rell, garden to guar-den, guardian to ge-ar-de-in, and so on. They in a way endeavour to out-Walker Walker, the result of such pronunciation being more funny than fine. "Ladies, be seated" is a favourite expression with the many, and although in itself it would appear to be a harmless and innocent little phrase enough, yet is it banished from polite circles on the ground of its being a vulgarism.

"Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are open to the same objections as are the words "ladies"

and "gentlemen," "men" and "women." There are times when the application of these words is correct and times when it is considered incorrect. At a morning call, for instance, both these expressions would be out of place, unfashionable, and odd, "How do you do?" and "Good-bye" being the recognised formulas between friends and acquaintances; while between strangers or between business men, or between people meeting on business matters, or between inferiors and superiors, the "Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are the only expressions in use by way of salutation, farewell, or dismissal.

The verb "To take" is open to the being considered a vulgar verb when used in reference to dinner, tea, or general refreshments. "Will you take some tea?" "Will you take any refreshments?" "Will you take some mutton?" "Will you take some soup?" in fact, any request which has for its object the fortifying of the inner man, if prefaced by "Will you take," is not considered to be *comme il faut*, the verb in favour for the offering of these civilities being the verb "To have." Why the one verb should be in fashion and the other out of favour is not difficult of comprehension, and society may be congratulated upon its insistence on having the right verb in the right place, providing that the verb "to take" be taken to mean "to seize what is not given," to "catch by surprise or artifice," to "lay hold on."

snatch, to seize, or to get hold of a thing in almost any way," leaving out of the question any other application of this verb; while the verb "to have," when used in this sense, must be taken to mean "to obtain, to enjoy, to possess;" thus all enjoyment would appear to be derived through the verb "To have," and not through the verb "To take."

"Don't you know," "You know," "Don't you see," "I say," are blemishes of speech whensoever they are used; but some few people contract the ugly habit of making use of these expressions unconsciously and continuously—perpetually interlarding their conversation with them.

The word "Fellow," however much in use it may be between men, sounds very objectionable from the lips of women; and some women are given to the foolish conceit of speaking of every man they may happen to know as a "Dear fellow," a "Charming fellow," a "Handsome fellow," or a "Clever fellow."

"Beau" and "Belle" are terms now no longer in use; and for "Beau" no equivalent has as yet been discovered, although the "Beauty" has replaced the "Belle."

Out of the nursery it is not customary for children to style their parents other than by the good old-fashioned reverential names of "Father" and "Mother." "Papa" and "Mamma" are now nursery names only; but "Pa" and "Ma," those unpleasant

abbreviations, are now happily quite out of date. The “drum and kettle-drum” of former days are words that have fallen into disuse, if they are not altogether obsolete, “Five o’clock tea” and “At home” having usurped their place.

The courteous “Thank you” has in a measure replaced the uncourteous “Thanks,” and it is no longer considered “very fine” to make this curt curtailment.

To ignore the letter “h” is so palpable a vulgarism of speech that it is almost superfluous to allude to it, and yet it is surprising how many well-informed and even well-educated people entirely dispense with its use, evidently oblivious that they are guilty of committing so vulgar an error.

CHAPTER VIII.

UBIQUITOUS BEACONS.

THERE is a certain kind of small talk irritating in the extreme, and with which ladies frequently favour society, founded upon purely domestic matters only appropriate to the home circle. Ignoring this fact, they freely indulge their friends with copious details of their particular grievances and other equally private matters, which, although of paramount interest to themselves, are devoid of interest to the strangers before whom they are related. At a luncheon, for instance, where perhaps five or six people are met together, two or three of whom are strangers to the rest, a talkative lady, who has not an idea beyond her nursery and her household, will monopolize the attention of the hostess and usurp the general conversation by an open and animated exposition of some recent experience of her own, the scene of action being either the kitchen or the nursery. Wherever these ladies are encountered

—and the class is a numerous one, so that the probability of meeting one of them amounts to almost a certainty—they will, if they can only make an opportunity, bore their friends in public as they have bored their husbands in private. A wise woman neither teases her husband with such petty details, nor takes the world at large into her confidence ; and, when desirous of unburdening her soul to some female friend and counsellor, does so in the privacy of a *tête-à-tête*. At these small luncheon parties, so small that every observation is heard by all, and where, when one person insists on talking down the others, she is generally allowed to have her way, it cannot be supposed that dialogue such as the following can prove other than intensely tiresome to those thus obliged to listen to it :

“ We are rather unsettled just now ; my cook has given me warning because she cannot get on with the butler, and I would rather have parted with him than with her ; but she did not give me the choice, and is quite determined to go. The butler I had before this one gave me a great deal of trouble ; I had to send him away at a minute’s notice ; and this one I have only had a month, but I am sure I do not know how he will turn out, although I had a good character with him, therefore he ought to be a good servant.”

The hostess would here put in, sympathetically :

“I hope he may suit you; it is a great bore having to change one's servants.”

The talkative lady, having recovered breath, says in answer to this: “Indeed, it is; I should have parted with my housemaid long ago, she is so bad-tempered, though a very good servant; but I am afraid I shall have to do so after all, as my nurse and she are not at all good friends. When we were away last week nurse wanted to go and see her mother, who is ill, only for an hour or so after the children were in bed, and she positively refused to sit with them, although I had expressly asked her to do so, if necessary.”

To which the hostess would pityingly rejoin: “How very disobliging of her.”

With this encouragement the catalogue of household woes would be further continued, merely broken by an occasional ejaculation drawn from one or other of the guests of, “How very provoking!” “How unfortunate!” and so on.

This is no exaggerated example of the irritating twaddle in which some ladies indulge, to the exclusion of all other topics, and to which sensible people are too often compelled to listen.

Another example of an inveterate talker, perhaps equally irritating, is the lady who may be looked upon as a talking abridgement of “Who's Who?” She delights in dilating upon the subject of the relation-

ships and connections of her friends and acquaintances on the principle that, "If Dick's father is Tom's son, what relation is Dick to Tom?" This subject is to many as bewildering as it is puzzling, the people under discussion being seldom of sufficient interest for their various degrees of relationships and their numerous family ties to be constantly borne in mind; but this want of interest by no means damps the ardour of a lady bent on improving the mind and assisting the memory of the company in general from her fund of information. She requires but very little to start her on her way; she is not one of those ladies who are at a loss for a subject, as she has always her especial subject at command. She merely requires a slight hint as to the locality or particular county from which one or other of the guests may have arrived, when the individual is pounced upon and attacked with—

"Do you know the B—s, in Blankshire? they are near neighbours of your friends the C—s. A cousin of theirs married a sister-in-law of Mr. C.; she was a widow, and her first husband was a brother of Captain D., who has a pretty place in Hampshire."

The unfortunate man who happens to have come from Blankshire, and who is unable to follow the lady's lead, catches at the one tangible idea that he is able to grasp, and says, "Indeed! a place in Hampshire?" But he is not allowed to remain long

in quiet enjoyment of the place in Hampshire, as he is at once introduced to the married sisters of Mrs. D. after this fashion :

“ Mrs. D. was a daughter of Colonel L. She had two pretty sisters ; one made a very bad marriage—she married a Mr. O., with no prospects whatever ; he was a lieutenant at the time, and Colonel L., her father, tried to get him an adjutancy in some regiment of militia, but did not succeed, so they were obliged to go out to India ; but he hopes to get his captaincy soon, and exchange into another regiment. The younger sister, who is not so pretty as Mrs. O., married a man much older than herself ; they live in Forfarshire the greater part of the year : she has two children. A cousin of her husband’s married a connection of my husband’s : it was rather odd ; he was brought up to be his uncle’s heir, Sir George Q.—I dare say you have heard of him ?”

To which the careless answer might be : “ I fancy I have heard the name.”

The lady, fearing to lose the lead, resumes quickly : “ The nephew I was speaking of is the son of Sir George Q.—’s eldest sister, and her brother’s marriage took her quite by surprise ; he was over sixty, and rather a valetudinarian, and the young lady was only nineteen.”

Some one present having heard the conversation from the last break would perhaps strike in with :

“Young girls seem rather partial to elderly bridegrooms. I met an interesting couple of this description when I was staying down in Wiltshire the other day.”

“I know some parts of Wiltshire very well,” remarks the former loquacious lady. “Were you staying anywhere near Devizes? and did you meet the W—s?” “I was staying the other side of the county with some old friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. S.,” might be the quiet answer to such an interrogation.

A lady whose ideas run in this groove is ever anxious to add to her stock of knowledge, and she generally possesses a certain kind of cleverness worthy of a better cause, which enables her to put an indirect question when it would be almost impertinent to put a direct one, and having extracted the information as to where one of the guests has been staying, she would follow it up with the further question of:

“Who was Mrs. S.?”

This inquiry is a very favourite one with a lady of this description, and she is ever putting the question of, “Who was she?” in reference to every married woman mentioned in her hearing; while, with regard to every man who may be mentioned, as she cannot say, “Who was he?” seeing that is what he was, she changes the form of inquiry into, “Who was his father?” or, “Whose son is he?”

By this means she amasses a vast number of bald facts on the subject of connections, relationships, and inter-marriages; she also greatly concerns herself with the question of dower, and as to whether a certain young lady brought her husband any money on her marriage, or whether she was a dowerless bride.

There are many ladies who have been well educated according to the general standard of home education—amiable, good-natured, pleasant people in all the relations of life—but who have never been credited with too much intelligence from their youth upwards, and who, when relating the simplest incident, or when endeavouring to express any opinion or even intention of their own, become verbose and hazy, through a habit of not concentrating their ideas. Thus they usually take the longest and most circuitous route to arrive at a given point, and when the goal has been at length reached, and the thread has been wearily followed through many windings, and turnings, and vagarious wanderings from the main line, they, fearing that they have not been sufficiently explicit, and having a vague idea that perhaps they have rambled a little on their journey, commence to retrace their steps from the first halting place, or from some point where they fancy they may have been a trifle obscure. These ladies are quite distinct from the Nickleby order of lady, being supe-

rior in many respects—if not with regard to intelligence and sense, not being prosy and elderly, but young and handsome, or middle-aged and comely, yet belonging to that type of woman whom a man in his anger would be very apt to term a goose.

One of these cheerful ramblers would perhaps commence a discourse with:

“You know what a lovely day last Thursday was? I think I told you we were to go down to Maidenhead?”

“Well, what prevented your going?” would be the natural query of her listener.

“Prevented us!” would be the surprised rejoinder. “What made you think we were prevented going? Why, we went. I was going to tell you all about it. We were a large party—five-and-twenty people. It was lovely on the water; we spent all the afternoon rowing; and we did not get back until twelve at night. But I must tell you how we nearly lost the train.”

“What! when you were coming back? What a bore for you!”

“Oh, no,” would be the complaisant answer; “we got home all right; I meant the train that starts at two o’clock, although it would not have signified if we had lost it, as there was another which started, I think, about twenty minutes afterwards. But then

we could not all have gone by the same train ; but we did not do so as it was ; the others came on by the next train, and we did not wait for them—we told them not to wait for us."

" You have not told me who went with you ; anybody I know ?"

" Oh, I meant to have commenced with that. Your friend, Colonel J., came ; and the A—s, and the B—s, and the C—s, and the D—s, and a great many more people. The dinner was very well done ; but it was very cold."

" Do you mean the dinner was cold, or the day ?"

" Why, the day, of course ; and everyone wore wraps. They said the dinner was very good. Two or three people lost their way, and did not get back until it was half over. I thought perhaps they had had telegrams, and gone back to town. Mr. G. was one of the missing ones, and he is always on committees in the House of Commons and everywhere, so I thought it most likely that he had been sent for ; but he had not : after all he was only walking about, as somebody had forgotten to tell him that we were to dine at six instead of at seven."

" Pleasant for G. How well you must have managed your party," the listener might say, ironically.

" Yes ; everything was managed beautifully. Of course, there were one or two little things which

might have been smoother ; but every one was very good-natured, and the party went off very well on the whole. But we had quite forgotten that Mrs. A. and Mrs. H. are not good friends ; in fact, they decline to speak to each other ; and they happened to sit next to each other at dinner. It was Mr. G.'s fault for being so late, as I think I told you."

"I did not make out that G. was much of a culprit, poor man ; but I suppose you know best. Anyhow, he seems to have lost his dinner."

A touch of irony, or a *soupson* of sarcasm is lost upon ladies of this temperament, their perceptive powers not being keen enough to detect it ; and, as they are quite devoid of humour, they fail to see the point of any joke, even when it is turned against themselves. This imperviousness to the shafts of ridicule stands a woman of this sort in good stead, as her *amour propre* is never wounded, her equanimity never ruffled, and when she says a foolish thing and lays herself open to be laughed at, her unconsciousness of having said anything more foolish than usual saves her from being disconcerted or put out of countenance, as a more sensitive or highly-strung woman would naturally be.

These ladies have also a happy knack of touching upon a person's weak point, and if there is one thing amongst all others they should not approach, they are sure to arrive at it before long ; so, finding themselves

on delicate ground, they apologize elaborately, the apology being more exasperating than the offence.

Thus, were the previous conversation continued, it might take this direction, were there a *raison d'être* for observations such as these to be made :

"I think Mr. A. is such a very pleasant man ; he says such amusing things about people, even if he is a little acid.—Oh, but I forgot, you do not like him ; of course, after the cruel and unkind things he said about your—Oh, how stupid of me ! I ought not to have mentioned it ; it must be *so* painful to you. I am very sorry I said anything about it ; I ought to have remembered it was such a sore subject with you."

To which the man whose wound she had thus laid open could only remark, stiffly, that "It was of no consequence."

These home-thrusts are more often than not made in the presence of an audience, which gives an additional sting to the idle words ; the victim knowing perfectly well that those unacquainted with the story will, on the first opportunity, ask for details of it at the hands of his fair and foolish friend.

"What is that story about A. and B.?" he knows will be the first question put before he is well out of hearing ; and he also knows that the discretion of the lady is not to be relied upon, and that she is not equal to the task of turning such a question aside, but will give the desired details with circumlocution

and colouring, without malice, but at the same time wholly without reticence.

Again, if a secret sorrow should exist in a family through any calamity, affliction, or disgrace having overtaken one of its members, these heedless women, by their random and careless remarks, unwittingly succeed in inflicting a great deal of unnecessary pain ; and when they have drawn the bow at a venture they are not clever enough to extricate themselves from the situation until the arrow has been well driven home.

Mal-apropos remarks such as these are sometimes made even by people possessing both tact and discretion, the difference being that on discovering that they have inadvertently said the wrong thing, they are equal to changing the subject without allowing it to be perceived that they are at all conscious of having wounded anyone's susceptibilities.

The former type of woman is quite distinct from the gossip-loving one ; the gossip-loving lady is always a bit of a *mauraise langue*. The recording the doings, misdoings, and sayings of one's acquaintances, of which genuine gossip consists, would be tame and lacking in interest if devoid of a certain raciness and spiciness, which ingredients are generally added by the retailers of the article in question. "The mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure," and a story loses nothing by the telling. The lady who

makes it her *metier* to chronicle all the mischances and mistakes of her friends, seldom puts the best construction upon them, or is ever inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt; neither does she inquire too closely into the truth of the narrative, lest, were she to do so, there should be nothing left to narrate, and "Othello's occupation gone." Thus many a *canard* circulated to-day is contradicted to-morrow. The bold gossipier, however, in time gets bowled out, and her stories, though listened to and laughed at, are never believed. Her friends, knowing her weak point and her special temptation, say carelessly, "Oh, if that is one of Mrs. K.'s stories, I don't suppose there is much in it." Kind and generous actions and kindly speeches are not as a rule repeated with much alacrity by the gossip-loving world; there is no capital to be made out of such, no merit accrues to the narrator, and no amusement to be extracted from the recital of another's goodness; thus, gossip turns a deaf ear to all that is praiseworthy, lending a willing one to all that is the reverse.

In contrast to the gossipy lady, may be mentioned the one who prides herself upon telling her friends "home truths." Estimable as her character may be, she yet succeeds in placing goodness, as she personifies it, in an unamiable light, and those who stand in fear of her probe, give her as wide a berth as they well can. To the wife whose husband is too much addicted to

racing, this outspoken lady would say grimly, "If your husband goes on betting in the way he is now doing, he is certain to ruin himself and his family before long." The wife is quite aware of the proclivities of the husband, and the possibility of the ruin, and scarcely needs this unwelcome reminder.

"How wretchedly ill your wife is looking, she will never recover her health here; you should send her away to a warmer climate," she would say to a man who, aware of his wife's delicate state of health, is yet unable to follow the advice given. "How painfully dissipated and extravagant your son appears to be; what a wasted career his is," she would say to a fond mother, whose moan it is that he is these things, or—"How unfortunate for your daughter her engagement with young H. being broken off," this being said to a mother who is smarting under the knowledge that her daughter has lost a good settlement in life. Or perhaps she would say :

"How very much that child resembles her aunt Caroline, she grows more like her every day," aunt Caroline being so plain, that the resemblance is an unwelcome fact, which the child's mother would prefer to ignore.

"What a very unbecoming colour green is to you; it does not suit your complexion in the least; I wonder why you wear it," would be said to a young niece with a slender income, who has thoughtlessly invested

in a green costume and bonnet, and who is painfully alive to the fact that green is decidedly not her colour, but who cannot afford to put it on one side, and does not require to have her opinion strengthened as to its unsuitability.

There is perhaps nothing easier than to put a girl, a woman, or even a man, for the matter of that, out of conceit with their garments. You but tell a man that you notice a wrinkle in the shoulder of his coat, or that the set of the sleeve is not quite perfect, than the coat is at once dispatched to the tailor, and it is doubtful if it is ever thoroughly again received into favour; while, to disparage any article of a woman's attire, from a bonnet to a boot, is fatal to any satisfaction she may feel in wearing it, even if she has the strength of mind to venture on doing so. There is no merit attached to the telling of home truths, which are as uncalled for as they are unwelcome.

Another type of woman frequently encountered in society is the plausible, specious, but selfishly insincere one, designated by those who know her best as a thorough humbug. Although not intending to be directly untruthful, she is very far from being accurate, and it is even doubtful if she endeavours to bend her steps in that direction. Strangers consider her delightful until they have known her long enough to discover that she is dangerous, and that the pleasant things she says to them, she has an unpleasant habit

of unsaying *of* them; thus, wishing to ingratiate herself, she would say :

“ How very handsome your daughter looks to-night, how beautifully she is dressed,” and more in the same strain, while of the same young lady she would remark, “ I cannot say I admire Miss D., and how over-dressed she is; with her mother’s small income, it is absurd the money spent on that girl’s dress; she actually wore velvet the other night much too heavy for her,” and so on, or she would perhaps say to some member of a family :

“ I hear you are not going to stay with your brother and his wife in Scotland this autumn, I thought you went every year,” to which her friend, not having been invited, would reply briefly, “ We usually do stay with them in September, but they have not asked us this year.”

“ I should think you found it rather dull there,” would be the sympathetic rejoinder. “ Anyone so bright and clever as you are, must feel the want of congenial companionship; some people, I know, consider your sister-in-law rather heavy to get on with.”

“ She is very quiet and reserved, especially with people whom she does not know very well,” might be the reply.

“ So I have heard, but then your brother is so genial and agreeable that, if she is not a very good hostess, it is not of much consequence, although

I should have thought your being with them, would have been of the greatest advantage to her; my husband thinks you make such a perfect hostess, that I confess I feel quite jealous sometimes."

Whether the husband has or not expressed himself to this extent, is of little moment to his imaginative partner, who merely makes use of him as an auxiliary to strengthen her position. The humbugging process has usually some end in view, and a lengthened visit at the house of the perfect hostess is perhaps, on this occasion, the one aimed at, and as incense rarely fails of producing a certain pleasing effect upon a woman when offered by a man, even though offered indirectly, the lady receiving it would be very likely to say with a pleased little laugh :

"It is very good of him to say so, but I am afraid he has not had much opportunity of forming a favourable judgment of my powers in that capacity, but perhaps when we are settled at home again, I may be able to persuade you both to pay us a little visit."

"I am sure we shall not require any persuasion to do a thing that would give us so much pleasure," the lady would retort, "it is too kind of you to think of us, my husband was only saying the other day how much he should like to see the improvements you have made at your place; we say *you*, because, as he says, you have such admirable taste."

After a pleasant visit has been paid, and all possible

hospitality and kindness have been received at the hands of her friend, this type of her class, true to her nature, cannot resist when the occasion presents itself playing the same game for perhaps a similar purpose with the before-mentioned sister-in-law of her friend, and of enacting some such part, and of carrying on some such dialogue as the following :

“ What a pity it is your sister-in-law does not care to stay with you at your beautiful place in Scotland. I can’t understand how she can possibly find it dull to be with you.”

“ Did she tell you she found it dull with us ? ” would be the abrupt query. “ She always appeared to be very pleased to come to us.”

“ I understood her to say that nothing could be so dull as it was, she gave me the impression that she thought you did not pay her sufficient attention when she was up in Scotland with you ; in fact, that you did nothing to amuse her, but I dare say she did not mean it ; she is a little jealous probably of your influence over her brother, she cannot help seeing how he naturally defers to you in everything.”

“ I cannot forgive her calling it dull with us,” remarks the aggrieved sister-in-law, “ she has been so much with us since our marriage, but I shall certainly not ask her so often in future if that is her opinion.”

“ Oh, I should not take any notice of this sort of

thing if I were you, people of her volatile temperament say a great deal more than they mean ; in fact, many things which it is so much wiser not to remember," and by this ambiguous way of speaking, she conveys the idea that far more remains to be told, but which is discreetly withheld. The lever on which this distorting principle is worked by these ladies, is not the downright intention of maligning and misrepresenting a friend or acquaintance, but is the selfish desire of talking themselves into favour at another's expense ; and displacing that other, and usurping the vacant place by simulating an interest and strong liking, is the easiest way of accomplishing this object. Thus they continue to humbug their friends and acquaintances, and establish many feuds in many families, and create no little mischief one way and another, but are tolerated in a certain degree by some people who think it rather pleasant than not to be humbugged when thoroughly on their guard against the administrator of the dose ; and by others, because, rather afraid of what may be said of themselves, they think it wisest to stand well with the humbug ; while others again have yet to learn of what these wily ones are capable, and the worth of their agreeable speeches.

As to the Mrs. Nicklebys of the feminine world, it would be superfluous to do more than to allude to them *en passant*,—it is enough that the master hand has

liinned them, but Kate Nickleby was hardly as independent and outspoken with her mamma as are the daughters of the Mrs. Nicklebys of to-day, who, if they do not exactly snub their mothers, yet the manners of many are somewhat akin to it, and they have an unmistakable way of keeping them in order, and of not allowing them to get out of their depths with a—"Oh, mamma, we know all about that, please don't tell us again ;" or "Mamma, dear, how absurd you are ; don't you know that you are not allowed to repeat that story ;" or "Oh, he does not want to be told anything about that, it would not interest him in the least, you must not say another word, dear ;" or "Oh, mamma, that was not in the least how it happened, you always begin in the wrong place ; let Mary tell the tale, then we shall understand it." The meek mammas take these rebukes and reminders in very good part, they admire the exceeding cleverness of their daughters, and are proud to think they have inherited it from their dear and lamented papas.

It would be also perhaps equally superfluous to do more than allude to the ultra-fast and fashionable women of society, whose conversation runs almost entirely in one particular groove, embracing the last club story, the last matrimonial separation, or divorce case. These do not come under the denomination of "gossipy ladies ;" as to them, the petty details of ordinary gossip have but little or no interest, they prefer

something of a far more exciting nature, and thrilling events, with their friends for the heroes and heroines thereof, is the talk to their taste, a taste greatly encouraged by certain society men, whose pleasure it is to collect the various club stories and *on dits* that are to be heard, for the amusement of their fair friends. What effect these topics have upon those who thus constantly indulge in them, is self evident from the frivolous fast tone which prevails in the sets to which these ladies belong, and which is certainly not calculated to—

“Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.”

Men, generally speaking, do not bore women or even each other in any way approaching the same degree as women are too often wont to do; *they* inflict their tediousness indiscriminately upon their own sex, and upon the opposite sex as chance may favour them, but men seldom if ever broach to women the subject that is uppermost in their minds, unless aware that they know something about it, or that it would be of interest to them; company talk being what men usually indulge in when in the society of women, while to each other, they freely discourse upon that which most concerns them. Two men for instance, thorough racing men, would probably converse in a manner almost unintelligible to non-racing men and to ladies in

general, and the latter are often not a little bored when men are thus engrossed in each other's conversation to their exclusion, when they cannot attempt to follow a line such as this.

A.—“It is whispered that Lawson has a light-weight that can beat Moonshine, which has been backed right up for the last week or so.”

B.—“According to the running, Moonshine ought to be the best animal in the stable. I don't think much of weight in a half mile race like that.”

A.—“There is not the least doubt that there is something wrong with Sir Benjamin, as I could not lay the odds to 20 against him at any price.”

B.—“Very likely, it is not his wind that is amiss, it is just their game to throw suspicion on some sound point, to draw attention off a weak one.”

A.—“Yes, as they always said that The Friar's hocks gave them fear when it was really the back sinew of his fore leg which prevented their training him.”

B.—“The mare is so well in, that it is a moral certainty for her, 5st. 5lb., when she would be quite positive to win with 9st. 10lb. I only hope they will oppose her nearer the day, as the proper odds are 10 to 1 on her. I dislike being on a long time, or would back her now.”

Country gentlemen have also a great propensity to talk “farming,” and compare sheep, mangold, turnips,

and their crops in detail at a dinner-party or elsewhere, utterly oblivious of the presence of the ladies, to whom dialogue such as the following must necessarily appear very dry if nothing else.

B.—“Store lambs and sheep ought to fetch good prices this autumn, unless we have another failure in the turnip crops, which will bring down the price.”

A.—“There has been a poor crop of lambs about us, and in the uplands I understand they have not had half a crop, some have only had from 12 to 20 per cent.”

B.—“I hear the ewes and hoggets have done very badly this season.”

A.—“How much cake do you give your ewes per head?”

B.—“Oh, from three quarters of a pound to a pound.”

A.—“How are the crops looking about you?”

B.—“The trefoil has been seriously affected by the rain, so much so, that it is almost impossible for it to recover, and the yield of clover seed promises badly.”

A.—“The corn crops about us, are bad in colour and full of weeds, but the ears appear well shaped and likely to fill: they have thickened considerably lately.”

B.—“A neighbour of mine has gone into pigs largely; he gave 16 guineas for a boar only six months

old, and he has a sow, he tells me, worth 30 guineas. It was the first sow at the K—— Show——”

When a man breaks off, perhaps for a moment, his interesting dialogue with his racing or farming friend to address some trivial remark or platitude to the lady seated near him, she feels neither grateful nor gracious, knowing full well that were she a Rochefoucauld in petticoats, her remarks would not have the fascination for him that those of his bucolic neighbour possess, so her answers are of the briefest, and he feels himself at liberty to turn to the beloved subject, which he does with unflattering alacrity.

Some prosy old gentlemen inflict their prejudices and prosiness upon younger men, but this is the privilege of age, and such garrulity meets with a respectful tolerance and good humoured forbearance.

CHAPTER IX.

PUTTING IN THE OAR.

LUNCHEON is one of those domestic sociable meals at which very little is expected of anyone in the way of conversation. If any one is disinclined to talk, or if not capable of indulging the company with a little agreeable small talk, no one notices the silent member. If a woman, and if she has nothing to say for herself, and bestows more of her attention upon her plate than upon her neighbour, she is merely credited with being really hungry, and with thoroughly enjoying her luncheon, a compliment to the food if not to her friends, and if the silent member be a man, he is not supposed to be at his best until the hour of dinner, but if either a man or a woman have the faculty of being spontaneously agreeable, and of keeping the luncheon party amused by their pleasant, lively small-talk, it is a pleasure not unmixed with surprise, conversation at such time as this consisting for the most part of fragmentary remarks and crumbs of talk scattered over the table, everyone putting in an oar when they fancy they can make a stroke, even if a feeble one.

“ Will you have some of this *salmi* of duck ? ” says a hostess hospitably to one of the gentlemen.

“ It is too good for me,” is the quiet rejoinder, “ I never eat much luncheon as a rule. I think meat once a day is sufficient for any man, and I confess it astonishes me what some ladies can do in this way.”

Those ladies who have just received a good help of roast beef, roast lamb, or a tempting cutlet with attendant vegetables, and who are unequal to defending their position, continue eating in silence, with heightened colour, feeling slightly indignant, while some more venturesome spirit comes to the rescue with, “ It surprises me how late some men breakfast, and what a substantial breakfast they make ; of course they are disinclined to have luncheon, whilst many ladies make luncheon their best meal, and eat *so* little at dinner, and really nothing at breakfast.”

“ I am afraid you are telling us of isolated cases as regards the breakfast and dinner appetites of your friends,” continues the gentleman, who is merely dallying with a piece of cake and sipping a little seltzer water. “ I could point out several of our acquaintances, fair ladies, whose exploits at breakfast and dinner, to say nothing of a hot luncheon at two, and tea and cake at five thrown in, would rather refute your argument as to the delicate appetites of the luncheon eaters.”

The hostess here puts in, addressing one of the

ladies, "Mr. G. has an absurd prejudice against seeing women eat anything, and his beau idéal of all that is attractive, is a lady who can enjoy nothing beyond a charcoal biscuit and a glass of water, in fact a martyr to dyspepsia."

"I don't go quite so far as that," returns he, "but I must say I do object to seeing women eat at all hours of the day. A woman cannot eat too little, it is all habit, and I am quite sure they do not require half the amount of food they take with such zest."

"You will not convert us to your way of thinking," says one of the ladies blithely; "a healthy mind goes with a healthy body, and good appetite, good digestion, and good health, are three graces always to be met with in each other's company, and are never seen apart."

"I am curious to hear then," is the retort, "what you have to say in favour of stimulants? Do you think it necessary to the health and complexion of a fair lady, the four or five glasses of wine, or even six, which is her daily régime?"

"I will tell you how I think it stands," rejoins one of the ladies, "one drinks wine as much from habit as for any other reason, and wine gives one a fictitious strength, it increases a languid circulation, and does one good."

"Habit," remarks he; "I thought I should arrive at it in time; half the eating and drinking I complain

of is the result of habit, you don't want it, but it is before you, so you take it, and then you fancy you cannot do without it."

Here another gentleman, who has been the while providing his fair neighbours with everything to their taste, and otherwise amusing them, finding his attention for the moment disengaged strikes in with :

"For my part, I think a woman who can appreciate a good dinner is probably able to order one, and is therefore likely to prove a good mistress of a house, and I think that the being able to order a good dinner is a great point in a woman's education."

"I quite agree with you," remarks one of the married ladies ; "as you say, the ordering of dinner is quite an art, one thinks of it the first thing in the morning ; it is so difficult to know what to order in the way of variety ; luncheon is no trouble to one, it does not require thinking about."

"Yes, there is nothing so easy to order as luncheon," assents the hostess, "while dinner is really an anxiety. I suppose it is, because on the one hand one has only to please one's self, while on the other, one's idea is to please one's husband."

"I should not have thought you found that a difficult task," remarks one of the gentlemen suavely.

"Neither do I," returns the lady, "but when it is a question of palate, I am afraid the cook has as much to do with it as I have. The best of men are put out

if there is anything wrong with the dinner, and a little temporary irritation becomes actual displeasure when guests have to take their share in the failure."

"Then your husband, according to your own showing, should be in a perpetual state of good humour; your dinners are always so excellent," remarks some man present.

"He is naturally good tempered," says the wife, "but men have many things to vex them besides a badly ordered or a badly cooked dinner, and luckily for me, we have a very good cook just now, or the shortcomings, if there were any, would rest on my shoulders. I think I have learnt to define betwixt undue extravagance and rigorous economy, the sort of 'penny wise and pound foolish' expenditure I should say."

"I quite understand what you mean," puts in one of the gentlemen; "half the women one knows have not your discrimination, and therefore things are not nearly so well done on a liberal income as they often are upon a comparatively moderate one."

"Yes," remarks one of the ladies sententiously, "it is the same with dinners as with dress and everything else, one woman will spend very much on her dress with but very little result, whilst another will spend but very little, and yet always appears to be perfectly and appropriately dressed."

"It is quite a gift the knowing what to buy and

when to buy it," here puts in one of the ladies meekly. "I am sure I often spend a quarter's allowance upon bargains, which cripples me for the rest of the year. Of course they are extremely cheap, but somehow I cannot turn them to very much account, yet one cannot resist buying a thing when it is evidently a bargain."

"Ladies of your pliant disposition," puts in a gentleman pleasantly, "should leave their purses at home when they place themselves in the way of temptation, and be content to admire what they see, and let another possess it."

"It is easier to preach than to practise," retorts the lady; "are *you* satisfied with admiring simply and not wishing to possess anything beautiful and cheap that may meet your eye?"

"I question the possibility of the union of those adjectives 'beautiful and cheap,'" replies he; "I generally find that if a thing is cheap, it ultimately proves to be a deception, and if it is beautiful, it is certainly not to be had cheap."

"Do you mean that beautiful things are not worth the price one pays for them?" remarks one of the ladies.

"I am in doubt as to your meaning," is the answer; "if you allude to works of art, I say no, age adds value to a work of art, but if you allude to one of nature's many works, female loveliness, then I hardly dare

express an opinion. I know that a high price is set upon it, a price I could not afford to give, seeing that it so soon fades and falls away."

"But there is the art that can immortalize," observes another lady.

"Do you wish to remind me that ladies practise this art in the hope of repairing the ravages of time?" says the dilettante.

"By no means, I don't pretend to be the censor of my sex," is the reply; "my allusion to art had reference to the prevailing fashion which induces every lady who considers herself, or who is considered to be a beauty, to have her portrait painted by some eminent artist."

"Rather a costly fancy for the wives of poor men to indulge in," remarks he, dryly; "£1500 is, I believe, about the figure, a bagatelle to a rich man, but not quite such a trifle to a poor man."

"There is nothing new in the beauties of the day being handed down to posterity by the 'painter's magic skill,'" observes one of the ladies; "every age has its beautiful women, and its celebrated portrait-painters, and most families pride themselves upon the possession of the portraits of their ancestresses whether beautiful or not."

"In olden days," is the reply, "photography was not dreamt of, or many a poor fellow would have been content with the coloured photograph of his

wife, in place of a costly portrait in oils, and many a man feels much the same about it now, I dare say, if the truth were known. I heard a story apropos of this the other day. ‘A celebrated painter had received a commission to paint a family group, consisting of a married lady and her two sisters, from the father of these ladies; unfortunately a financial collapse left the picture on the artist’s hands; the husband of the married lady, thinking £1700 too high a price to pay out of his own pocket for the portrait of his wife, allowed it to become the property of a dealer, and finally bought it under the hammer at a very considerable reduction from the original sum.’”

“I consider,” remarks one of the ladies, “that the portrait-painters of the day are the most accurate of historians, and supplement the history of the times. It is an old picture we consult rather than the work of an eminent historian, when we wish to refer to a type of beauty, or to reproduce a style of dress—the Leightons and the Millaises, the Sants, the Richmonds, and the Poynters—will become in their turn the historians in the future.”

“Fashion is fickle even as regards feminine loveliness,” puts in one of the guests; “the ideal beauty of the hour leans to leanness rather than to *embonpoint*; but pardon me, I should have said inclines to the slender.”

“It strikes me,” remarks another, “that your

popular beauties are very much overrated ; a woman becomes the fashion, and her claims to beauty are taken upon trust by the many who always require a lead, while those capable of forming an opinion do so independently of the popular prejudice, and often fail to detect a line of beauty in a much vaunted face or form."

"One of the greatest accessories to beauty," rejoins one of the ladies, "is, I should say, costly attire, or an exquisitely arranged toilette ; simplicity concealing art and expense ; the notion 'That beauty unadorned is adorned the most,' is very much out of date in these days, when men encourage the extravagance they decry."

"By encouragement—you mean man's quickness to discover when a woman is well-dressed," answers one of the gentlemen, "and his weakness in making his appreciation known to her ; but this is encouraging good taste rather than extravagance, and is a distinction which ladies do not seem to grasp ; in the place of one gown they put many, and where one would answer all reasonable purposes twelve are found to be absolutely imperative, whilst many men do not know one dress from another, thus this display is lost upon them, whatever it may be upon their own sex ; perhaps, after all, rivalry is the mainspring of extravagance in dress, and that we are but indirectly the object of it."

Here some lady would put in her oar, and give some one else an opportunity of putting in theirs; but this putting in the oar should be done at the ebb of the tide and not at its full flow; people are impatient of a premature interruption which would meet with approval if made but a few moments later; an awkward stroke of the oar is apt to "catch a crab," while a quick even stroke carries the boat happily along.

A rambling incoherent remark reflects no credit upon the one making it, and as often as not falls to the ground; and there is very much in the arranging a sentence previous to uttering it, so that it may be terse and complete, the point of the observation being rather at its close than at its opening.

Ladies are understood to be very much at their ease at luncheon, and can put in their oar without any difficulty, not being overweighted by the knowledge that they are expected to be fairly agreeable, if not amusing, for the space of two hours, the consciousness of which is apt to paralyze the powers of a novice in small talk.

Some women have a habit when arriving late at a luncheon party of being profuse and diffuse in their apologies, and of entering into explanations as to the why and the wherefore of their tardy arrival in place of making some brief and apologetic excuse, such as "I am shocked at being so late, but I was un-

avoidably detained ;" or, " I hope you will excuse my being so late, I could not possibly get here sooner ;" or some such remark equally to the point.

The conversation at wedding breakfasts is rather restricted to *tête-à-têtes* than not, this is necessarily so, from the fact that couples are sent in to breakfast as they are in to dinner. Admiring the bride, praising the bridegroom, passing compliments on the bridesmaids, and encomiums on the presents, are appropriate materials for small talk, providing they are not too freely drawn upon and are used with discretion, always remembering that the members of the bride's family are the best listeners to this class of small talk. But conversations at these gatherings are naturally founded upon present facts, and to offer examples of such would be beside the question.

CHAPTER X.

“RUNNING ON.”

PEOPLE not particularly clever in originating small talk find that when expected to converse with a casual acquaintance at a casual meeting, whether in a country lane or a crowded street, in the park or on the promenade, or elsewhere, they are often compelled to give utterance to the most vapid of commonplaces; having nothing better to say at the moment, their choice of words being as limited as are their ideas, the same adjective, when an adjective is used, doing duty at least five times in as many minutes, whilst oftener than not the unfortunate adjective selected is the one least suitable for the purpose; the word “charming,” for instance; “a charming day,” “a charming house,” “a charming walk,” “a charming carriage,” “a charming dinner,” is further drawn upon and converted into an exclamation, thus: “How charming,” probably applied to some object, whether animate or inanimate, and which is far from being “pleasing in the highest degree.”

The would-be elegant young man is rather addicted to the use of superlatives, and the very weakness of

his expressions combined with the feebleness of the idea expressed, causes the strength of the adjective used to be the more apparent and to appear the more absurd. The exclamation of "charming!" when applied to a fine pair of eyes is thoroughly appropriate, but when applied to a little dog, or to a grand dinner, it is evidently the wrong word in the wrong place.

Young men belonging to the order of "prig" considered it to be the height of elegance to commence their small talk after this fashion, and to continue it in the same elegant vein :

"Are you musical?" "Are you fond of reading?" "Do you sing?" "Are you artistic?" to which questions will now doubtless be added,—

"Do you paint on china?" "Do you model in soap?" in fact, they possess a *repertoire* of the like questions, which are varied perhaps in the way of a statement by making a change in the pronouns, replacing "you" with "I," with the interpolation of an adverb, thus:—

"I am very musical." "I sing a little."

"I am very fond of reading." "I draw a little."

"I am rather artistic." "I am very fond of pictures."

"I paint a little on china."

"I think it is very nice to model in soap."

The missish young lady, the fac-simile of the prig, takes a parallel line to his, and her small talk consists

of a series of trivial questions, for the simple reason that when an answer is returned to one of her queries, she has neither the comprehension nor the sense to enable her to take her cue from the answer given ; she, therefore, puts another equally petty and irritating interrogation totally irrelevant to her last remark. She does not tarry to consider what may be the individual pursuits or proclivities of the man she is addressing, or of men in general, but goes upon her own standpoint, and does not see beyond it ; thus she says :—

- “Are you fond of balls ?”
- “Are you fond of London ?”
- “Do you go to many balls when you are there ?”
- “Are you fond of the play ?”
- “Have you read Miss Saddon’s last novel, ‘The Countess’s Coronet ?’”
- “Are you fond of novels ?”
- “Do you play lawn tennis ?”

These feeble attempts at small talk, although not a little provoking, are perhaps preferable to the fast and flippant manner of speech in which certain young ladies indulge, under the impression that such a style is captivating, and anything but slow. They have at command a vocabulary of terms and expressions bordering upon slang, if not slang strictly speaking, and altogether fast, if not absolutely vulgar. This type of girl when present at a race-meeting prides herself on

emulating the jargon of the jockey, and likes nothing so much as being mistaken for a stable lad, as far as her conversation is concerned.

To exercise natural intelligence and common sense with regard to racing matters when present at race-meetings is womanly and sensible, and even the wives and daughters of the owners of racethorses, accustomed as it were to a racing atmosphere, do not make use of racing technicalities more than would those who have but a very superficial acquaintance with the sport. The missishness of styling racehorses "loves of horses," or "darling creatures," or any particular one, a "darling creature," or a "duck of a horse;" or to exclaim, "What a love!" or "What a sweet creature!" is as much out of place and out of grace as is the before mentioned stable talk. One of the points where a little of this intelligence or common sense is needed is in the referring to the sex of an animal,—as to allude to a mare as a "he," or to a horse as a "she," is a mistake which a male acquaintance is very impatient of, and one which ladies are very likely to make, through not noting whether the names on the race card are of the masculine or feminine gender: occasionally, the names themselves are perplexing to a woman not too well versed in racing matters, such names, for instance, as "Isonomy," "Kisber," "Wheel of Fortune," "Cremorne," and so on.

When a lady wishes to evince a certain amount of interest in what is going on, to talk up to the following standard would suffice for this object :

“Did you see that race well, you seem to have a good place,” would remark an acquaintance.

“I saw the horses very well until they passed the bushes; had you any bets on the race?”

“I am sorry to say, I had, and I have not backed a winner to-day, yet I don’t think I shall make another bet.”

“That would be very wise of you, I suppose you were on Juliet, in the Nursery Stakes.”

“I was, and the young lady disappointed me, as young ladies are very apt to do.”

“There are five races, I see, and Juliet is to run in a match with King Victor, so perhaps she will behave better if you trust her again.”

“No, I have had enough of her, she is evidently not in form, the numbers are up, shall I mark your card for you?” and after the card has been marked, and her friend has gone off to get some valuable information respecting the next race, the lady is probably accosted by another acquaintance, with

“Are you inclined to have a bet? you may have your choice of odds or evens. I believe they are all equally bad, if you ask me.”

“Then why do you tempt me to bet?”

“I thought, perhaps, you might like to lose half-a-

crown to me, and turn my luck, I have lost every bet I have made ; I do not seem to be able to spot a winner."

" What a pity it is that men cannot be content to enjoy a race from a sporting point of view without betting so heavily. I should have thought that the vexation of losing one bet was hardly compensated for by the pleasure of winning another."

" I don't know about that, one likes the excitement of betting, I suppose, the uncertainty and the risk, as danger in the hunting field, add zest to the sport, so the danger of losing one's money has its charms without taking into account the pleasure of winning other people's money."

" Well, I will not give you a chance or the pleasure of winning any half crowns of me, but I will stand five shillings with you in every bet you make for the rest of the day, in the hope of bringing you good luck."

" That is very pretty and good of you ; let me see, there are five races to come off, so you stand a chance of losing five and twenty shillings."

" I think, on second thoughts, I must withdraw my proposal and not encourage you to lose your money."

" Whether I win or lose to-day it will come to the same thing at the end of the year, although I have the best information, and am in with many owners of race-horses, and although some of the cleverest

trainers and squarest jockeys will tell me anything, I always find I am out at the end of the racing season."

"I should have thought with such advantages in your favour you could have won a fortune."

"Fortunes are oftener lost than won on the turf, I assure you; if there is a good thing it is such a hot favourite that there is no backing it; backers of horses are sure to be 'broke' in the long run; the thing is to lay against them, and that I cannot afford to do."

"Then I suppose the Ring wins all the money?"

"Sometimes, but not when the favourites win, of course."

"What is the favourite for the next race?"

"'Queen of Hearts,' they lay 6 to 4 on her, but I have a fancy for another, 'The General,' I have put a fiver on him, I think I shall go and see them saddle;" upon this, the backer of "The General" takes his departure.

Ladies, whose relatives and friends are partial to racing, are usually present at race meetings, and from association acquire just sufficient knowledge of the subject to enable them to take part in some such dialogue as the foregoing, but a far larger number of high-minded men and women set their faces against racing on principle; and many men have a deep-rooted aversion to gambling on the turf or elsewhere, and to

such it would be far more painful to win money from either stranger or friend than to lose money themselves.

At flower shows, polo matches, cricket matches, archery meetings, lawn tennis parties, and bazaars, the occasion of such meetings renders the making of small talk a very easy matter, but at those casual meetings that so frequently occur between acquaintances, there being no particular fact to go upon suggestive of small talk outside of actual knowledge of each other's movements, greater necessity exists for the exercise of intelligence and rapidity of thought, for the bringing up at the identical moment the most applicable and pleasant observations.

Very slight acquaintances find that to allude to the mutual friend through whom the acquaintance has been made in the first instance, is a safe and sure lead to conversation, and one which both can follow without hesitation, it is also a graceful recognition of the absent one, and a courtesy which both are pleased to render; but when an acquaintanceship has existed for some little time, or has progressed towards any degree of intimacy, then this allusion or recognition would be made, if made at all, in a much more familiar style, and in the course of, rather than at, the commencement of a conversation.

With some people acquaintanceship never ripens into friendship—acquaintances never become friends,

what they were three years ago they are to-day, neither nearer nor dearer, but yet they cannot be taken upon the same footing as can be new acquaintances; a new acquaintance may develop into a warm friend, but these familiar acquaintances remain familiar acquaintances until the end of the chapter. Although not on ceremony with them, no germ of intimacy is called forth by them, either from a want of sympathy in their natures or from the force of circumstances, or from any other equally cogent reason; thus, when familiar acquaintances meet they not unfrequently indulge in a light vein of talk, in which is interwoven banter, compliment and common sense,—

“An agreeable surprise to see you here this morning,” remarks a man to the foremost of a group of ladies, encountered in the park, on the promenade, or in some public place where the gay world congregates. “How long do you intend to honour this place with your presence?”

“I shall honour it very likely for the space of three weeks, and then wing my flight to another sphere—the sphere of home.”

“Then let us bask in the sunshine of your smiles while we may; there are several of your humble admirers here just now, and I have had tender inquiries about you from many.”

“I hope you were able to answer them satis-

factorily ; whom do you designate my "admirers" ? I am rather curious to hear."

" You do not expect me, I hope, to advocate another man's cause, or the causes of other men ; to establish my own claims to your favour is as much as I am equal to, and I even doubt if I am equal to that."

" You are always reminding me of your desire to win my favour, but somehow I fail to perceive the efforts you make, and I always find you at the point where I left you."

" Is not that an advantage in itself ; can you say the same of many people ; do you find them where you leave them, and can you take them up again at the point where you left them ? "

" Perhaps not, there are people with whom one gets on very well, but who, one finds on the next time of meeting, to one's chagrin and discomfiture, have gone back like the hands on the dial of a clock, to the first hour of acquaintance, and one has, if they are worth the trouble, to go over the same ground again with them, or to give them up with a sigh of disappointment."

" In some cases it would be a pleasure to heave that sigh, especially when temper is the cause of the coldness, and one is expected to woo back into good humour some one with whom it is expedient to stand well ; but you were not alluding to temper, I know, but to caprice and reserve, and in you these

flaws in the feminine character are unknown—you are constancy personified; to what shall I compare you? To the ever-changing ocean? No. To a bright sunny morning? No; it may rain while the day is yet young; nor to the inconstant moon—to the stars and constellations? No; we see too little of them. There is nothing in nature to which I can compare you. I must compare you, if I may, to the best emblem of constancy I can think of at this moment—the ‘Queen’s Taxes,’ or the ‘Water Rate.’”

“ You are certainly more practical than poetical this morning; I am sorry that my presence does not inspire you with any nobler or more exalted simile.”

“ The fault is mine, not yours; my deficiencies cannot be measured against your perfections; I should think that you were pre-eminently constituted to grasp friendship in its truest meaning; as I understand friendship, it is an unwritten commandment.”

“ Do you mean friendship between man and man, or between woman and woman?”

“ At the moment I spoke I was thinking of that very rare friendship that is sometimes to be met with between man and woman; I should say that a solid friendship between women themselves is even rarer.”

“ How do you arrive at such a conclusion? have your lady friends been traitors to each other? if so, I am sure you are the cause of it.”

“ That is it; woman’s friendship is a light and airy

fabric ; let a man come between them, or let him hardly get as far as that, but merely hover in sight, then the harmony and the concord, and the amicability of their sweet natures disappear, and pique, umbrage, alienation, with a touch of hostility, usurp their place, and a man has as much as he can do to steer his course pleasantly between the two fair barks."

"I am afraid from this confession you have been behaving very badly, and have been insinuating your admiration to two ladies at the same time ; no wonder they were jealous ; how cruel of you."

"Do you really believe that I could be cruel to that extent, it is I who am the victim always ; women have a large share of jealousy in their composition—they are jealous of each other's belongings, houses, carriages, horses, jewels, dresses, beauty, and even babies ; there are exceptional women, of course, like yourself, who are above this weakness of the sex ; and women's friendships are thus fickle, I suppose, because founded on these things."

"She must be a very shallow woman who forms friendships only with regard to position and possessions."

"Doubtless ; but I am afraid as society goes, most women are shallow, only some are a little more shallow than others ; there is no depth in these women, whether for love, gratitude, or friendship,

and their intellect is on a par with their depth; yet with regard to all worldly matters, these shallow women are as shrewd as they are selfish, and are quite aware that one and one make two, and when not particularly shrewd, they are exceptionally narrow-minded."

"You hear what Mr. Y— thinks of our sex, and how he reckons us up," might here observe the lady holding this conversation to one of her friends forming the before-mentioned group. "Are you not rather afraid that he will some day analyse your character?"

"He seems rather formidable, certainly," might be the answer, "but, perhaps, I shall escape by reason of his having a more important study on hand."

"What can be a more delightful study than the study of a delightful woman," remarks the familiar acquaintance, "and can one have too many of these fascinating studies to occupy one's thoughts and one's leisure? and when one has discovered qualities of heart and mind in a gracious woman, qualities that appeal to one's highest sympathies, one feels proud and honoured to be admitted even into the outer courts of her friendship."

"I am inclined to think that friendships such as you imagine, however pleasant, have also their dangerous side, and however enlarging and expanding familiar friendship with a man may be to the mind of a woman, yet the boundary line between love and friendship is so undefinable that a woman may find

herself out of her depth before she is aware that her feet have even left the shore."

"There are times of course when friendship out-steps its prescribed limits, and when another region is entered upon, viz., Cupid's domain, but it is when sailing on the smooth waters of friendship that a woman is at her brightest and best; she is not blinded by love as to the imperfections of her friend, she is not ruffled by jealousy as to the bestowal of his attentions, she is able to appreciate and draw out all his nobler aspirations and thoughts, and is oft-times the recipient of his confidence."

"The glowing colours in which you have painted friendship," remarks one of the ladies, "only proves how insidious are its windings, and how fast one had need to anchor one's bark in the harbour of friendship to prevent its being carried by the current into the tempestuous sea of love."

"Perhaps, there to be shipwrecked," remarks another lady, with emphasis.

"One word more, and we shall be on the quick-sands of conversation, if not out of our depth," remarks a third.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies, I am a safe pilot, I know the coast too well to run any of you aground."

"Well, then, we will say good-bye for the present," might remark the leading lady, if she wished to proceed in another direction, or was desirous of joining

other friends—"and believe in the flattering opinion you have just expressed of your capabilities as pilot and guide."

Some ladies experience a certain awkwardness in breaking off a conversation with an acquaintance at the right moment, before the acquaintance has tired of them, or they of the acquaintance; others again are not quickwitted enough to take note of the signs which an acquaintance sometimes exhibits when desirous of taking his leave, and continue to engage him in some trivial small talk against his inclination, but which he is too polite to break through by taking an abrupt departure and an abrupt farewell.

Young men are also occasionally unobservant of the signs which ladies not unfrequently exhibit when they wish to enjoy a little of the society of some other friend or acquaintance of either sex, and ladies, as a rule, when intimate enough to discourse upon domestic or family matters, find the presence of a young man rather *de trop*. Such topics are the most congenial to ladies, but when not sufficiently well-acquainted with each other to touch upon these, to them interesting matters, then general subjects supply their place.

A very favourite theme with mere acquaintances is popular preaching, at popular churches, but in the discussion of this theme, both caution and care are necessary to avoid trenching upon the susceptibilities of each other in this respect; ladies, having a tendency

to admire any particular preacher, generally do so *con amore*, and are rather inclined to carry this admiration to extremes. After the first greetings and mutual inquiries after mutual acquaintances have been made between two ladies at an accidental meeting, one of the two would probably say:—

“I went to St. John’s Church yesterday, what a good service it is; the church was so full, I had great difficulty in obtaining a seat.”

“I never go to St. John’s,” is most likely the response, “I do not like the clergyman there, I always attend St. Jude’s, the music is so very good, and Mr. G— is so popular, and is such an excellent preacher.”

“I have not heard him; I thought the sermon at St. John’s was a very sensible and practical one.”

“Then you could not have heard Mr. K—; his delivery is deplorable, besides which he insults one’s understanding; he apparently ignores that one has had any religious education whatever; one might be a heathen, a Hottentot; he might prove very useful as a missionary, preaching to ignorant savages, but the egotism with which he propounds the simplest Gospel truths, as if he and he alone possessed the privilege of being acquainted with the Scriptures, is almost calculated to repel rather than to attract, and to do infinitely more harm than good to the cause of religion.”

“Oh, is he that sort of man? I quite understand the type of preacher you mean; he does, as you say, a great deal of harm in giving people a distaste for attending church; what a pity it is that well-meaning men should so often produce this feeling—men of very average abilities, and who do not atone for this want of intellectual power by bringing zeal, earnestness, and heartiness into their work; men, whose very last vocation is that of a preacher, deliver a string of phrases, if not exactly incoherent, at least having but very little relation to each other, and of which the meaning, if meaning there be, is yet so extremely obscure, that the monotony of the delivery robs such discourse of even the little meaning it was intended to convey, and produces on the hearer only a soporific effect.”

“It is an immense advantage certainly,” might be the rejoinder, “to attend a church where the service is after one’s own heart, and where one may expect to hear a sermon from a really clever man.”

“Indeed, it is; but I think it is rather a mistake to pin one’s faith to any particular man as some women are apt to do, and to allow the individuality of the man to assert itself too strongly over their minds; it is as if they could not accept the truths of religion at other hands; and with some popular preachers this individuality is made so prominent in the pulpit, that it might be said of them, as it was

said of Erskine, that one cannot see Christ over their heads."

"I do not agree with what is termed running after popular preachers ; I only regret there should be so few good preachers to be met with, that one hardly ventures to hope, taking churches on an average, one is likely to hear anything approaching to a good sermon, and when one reflects what an immense power for good is placed in the hands of the clergy by this preaching from the pulpit, it is disheartening to feel how little is made of it ; it should be one of the strongest points of the Church, whereas it is one of her weakest."

"Yes, every one, more or less, especially one's men friends, make the shortcomings of the preacher an excuse for a lax attendance at church, and many people go so far as to think that to be lacking in the gift or power of preaching should be considered a serious drawback against ordination."

"I have a very simple plan," says the other lady, "when the sermon is disappointing ; I do not attempt to follow it, I withdraw my attention entirely from it, knowing that were I to listen I should only feel grieved and perhaps a little irritated that so incompetent a man should occupy so important a post ; and I give myself up to a twenty minutes' meditation and self-examination, and generally find that I leave the church a wiser woman and in a better frame

of mind than had I been vainly striving to extract an atom of good from an ocean of words."

"It appears to me," retorts the other, "that some people are inclined to estimate the sermon above the service; to me the service is immeasurably above the sermon in importance; in most churches one feels that this importance is fully recognized, and holds the place it was originally intended to occupy."

Ladies of a solid turn of mind are very partial to discussing their views and ideas on religious subjects, and with more or less of enthusiasm. The "choir" and church music are interesting themes, more especially to those residing in the country; while to all, the schools connected with the church, local charities, and benevolent associations are a never failing bond of interest.

Music itself is a great aid to conversation with many ladies, not from the point of view of a professor, or from that of a self-appointed critic, but rather from a drawing-room stand point, from which point all ladies have something to say to each other, respecting the newest songs or the newest pieces, &c.

"Have you heard any pretty new songs lately," is a frequent question amongst ladies, and one with which they often open a conversation.

"I do not know that I have," is almost as generally the reply.

"It is so difficult to find a song that one really

likes, and that is worth the trouble of learning ; if the air is taking, the words are altogether so foolish."

"Yes," replies the other, "there are singularly few new songs amongst all those that are written that one cares to hear."

"I am rather fastidious, perhaps," is the rejoinder, "and the more difficult to please, as I learn my songs by heart."

"That is a most excellent plan," returns the other, "a song sung from a sheet of music has never the same effect as when sung from memory ; a song gains infinitely in feeling, expression, and in phrasing, when not sung from music, but I suppose it requires considerable talent to be able to do this well."

"Not at all," is the reply, "it is simply a question of application and habit, and should, I think, form part of every girl's musical education."

"You are quite right," acquiesces the other, "it cannot be more difficult to remember notes and words than it is to recollect accurately dates, events, and incidents, things which every young lady is expected to commit to memory, and not to require the aid of books to refresh it on every occasion."

"As girls advance into womanhood," adds the other, "they tell you that they have not the time even if they had the talent to learn their songs by heart ; but if they had acquired the habit in early girlhood,

and had accustomed themselves to readily doing so, they would find in after years that the learning a song or piece of music would be to them surprisingly easy."

"How very few girls one meets are able to do this, and what an advantage these few have over the many who, when asked either to sing or to play, have this invariable reply, 'I have not brought any music with me,' or, 'I cannot sing without my music.' To be able on being asked to sing or play to instantly comply without excuse or hesitation places the performer in a very attractive light in the eyes of both friends and strangers, and invests the performance with an additional charm."

"Yes, there is always a something of ostentation in a lady having a roll of music brought to her, and in having the candles lighted, as of course she cannot read music in the twilight, and twilight is of all hours the one most delightful wherein to listen to sweet strains."

"Very true," assents the other, "these preparations have the effect of leading one to expect something very good, and oftener than not it proves to be something very poor and weak, both as regards the song and the singer, and people are the more on the alert to criticise both."

"Thorough musicians have always their music at their fingers'-ends," continues one of the ladies, "and

are above and beyond these preliminaries and preparations."

"I am always amused," returns the other, "at the persuasion which some young ladies require to induce them to sing; some one, perhaps, asks them 'if they sing?' and their answer is, 'that they do a little;' this is followed by 'Do sing something, then, we should be so pleased to hear you;' which is met with 'I am afraid I cannot sing to-day, I have rather a cold;' to which some one else replies, 'Oh, do try what you can do, it would be such a pleasure to hear you sing;' but the young lady continues mildly to protest that she is unequal to singing that afternoon or that evening, although she does so in such a manner as to lead her friends to infer that could they persuade her sufficiently they would be rewarded by gaining their point."

"I invariably find," says the other, "that ladies who can sing, do not make a merit of compliance when asked to do so, and dislike parade or fuss of any kind; when not in voice they say so in a straightforward manner without preamble or in the hope of being persuaded to alter their minds."

"How remarkably well you phrase your songs and accent your words," rejoins one of the ladies, pleasantly, "indeed, it is one of the great charms of your singing. A serious fault with many young ladies is their utter want of intelligence with regard to this,

and when a word is divided into syllables, and a note given to each, they accent each syllable with equal force, thus we hear of the 'gol-den' days,' and of the 'bro-ken' heart,' and of 'the wa-ters' that flow,' and of 'the woo-den' piers,' and 'how of-ten', oh, how of-ten', and so on ; this mode of pronunciation robs the prettiest song of its pathos."

"It is this fault," might be the reply, "that is even more perceptible and exaggerated, I think, when young ladies with but an indifferent knowledge of the language attempt French songs, the words of which they render thus,—*l'hiron-del*—, *le' d'o-pa*—, *le'*, *ma-ti na*—, *le'*, *nourel*—, *le'*, and though they may follow the music correctly according to the letter, yet the spirit of the composition is wholly wanting, the adhering to the subdivision of the words and the marked accentuation awarded by them to final syllables, causes the whole when not unintelligible to be thoroughly ludicrous."

Another equally fertile subject with ladies is the light literature of the day, the current stories in the magazines, and new novels in general, from which they often stray to the fashion books and dress, which to them are mines of information ; they prattle of long trains and short trains, Directoire bonnets and Gainsborough hats, of *moyen âge* bodices, and of Greek draperies, of fabrics and furs, of court dresses and country dresses, of satins and serges, and their favourite

shops, the best qualities and the lowest prices, all of which come in for their share of attention.

Conversation between ladies is essentially of a practical turn, and does not admit of repartee, whilst between very young ladies the topics chosen generally relate to their pastimes, pursuits, and pleasures, rather than to their ideas and individual feelings.

The description of small talk which takes place between people new to each other at accidental meetings, is by no means of an ambitious character, it usually commencing with polite inquiries respecting the whereabouts of absent friends; after an interchange of civilities between a lady and gentleman, the lady would, perhaps, inquire if he had seen anything of her friends, the Y—s lately? whereupon he would be able to say whether he had, or had not met them, and if he had done so, he would have the opportunity of mentioning where the meeting had occurred, and any little incident connected with it; or, if the question had been addressed to the lady, she would then be in the position of having something tangible to start with: if the *rencontre* with the absent friends had taken place at Paris, the word Paris would suggest a very flood of pertinent and pleasant talk, as at whatever season of the year a visit to Paris is paid, something of extra interest is the event of the moment, such as the New Year's fêtes and the New Year's gifts, and

the New Year's entertainments, the Easter fêtes and the Summer fêtes, the Grand Prix de Paris and other races ; while the theatres usually produce some piece which attracts a good deal of notice, either from its being very original or very risky. The events of each season would be referred to in season, and the pleasures of Paris at each and every season. From this point, the question of crossing the Channel might be mooted, as to whether he or she had had a rough passage, or a smooth passage ; whether they were good sailors or the reverse ; and if the man was a good sailor, yachting would naturally come on the *tapis*, and he could talk of the cruises he had made of late, she drawing him on to tell her where he had been, what he had done, and what he had seen ; if he had been in out-of-the-way places he would have out-of-the-way things to tell her ; had he made his way into the interior of Japan, for instance, in quest of adventure, he would relate how it was customary with the natives to take their baths at all hours of the day, without rather than within doors, and how the water of these baths is kept pure by means of charcoal, and how an old lady will leave her bath with great equanimity to point out the way to a traveller, who has inquired it of her, and then skip back to it with corresponding agility ; and of the river bath, where the Japanese bathe in company, sitting for hours under the cascades of water formed by the river in its course ; and, turning from

the lower orders, he would tell of the courtesy and beauty of the women of the upper classes, and of the elegance and grace of their attire, and of the honour and chivalry of the men, and of their holding life so cheap and their friends so dear. If he had voyaged, and travelled, observed and remembered, his conversation would be unusually pleasant were the intelligence of the lady equal to the calling forth of his reminiscences, by well-directed questions and leading remarks ; but if the extent of his yachting had been in the Solent, or if he disliked yachting, and would not go on board a yacht if he could help it, he would probably add that he would not cross to Calais even, unless he was sure of a moderately calm passage, as he hated the prostration which always follows upon seasickness, to which the lady might reply, "That very little sympathy is awarded in this malady to those who suffer by those who do not."

"I find this to be the case," resumes the man, "one's more fortunate friends have but little pity to bestow upon one, not that one requires their pity, and, as far as I am concerned, when I have the ill-luck to be laid up, I prefer being left to myself, and that no one should come near me until I am well again."

"How very misanthropical and odd of you," says the lady, "most people desire sympathy and attention when they are ill from the women of their family,

however much they may dispense with it at other times."

"At all other times," returns he, "I am open to any amount of sympathy and attention from any one kind enough to bestow it. I am one of those who like to suffer in silence, and not to pain the tender hearts around me by the exhibition of my sufferings."

"I believe that is only an amendment to your last Diogenes-like speech, there is too much consideration about it to be quite genuine," returns the lady.

"You do men injustice, and me in particular," is the retort; "it is a favourite theory, I believe, with women, that all the feeling is on their side, and all the callousness and selfishness on ours, whereas I maintain that when a woman is really hard-hearted, she astonishes man with the cruelties she is capable of."

"Perhaps it is as well," replies the lady, "that men should occasionally meet with women who are less tender-hearted than their sisters, and who in some measure avenge their sex."

"Ah, but in most instances," returns he, "the one who takes his punishment from these fair hands, is the one who least merits it, and to whom it is therefore the more unexpected through his belief in the truth and goodness of woman; and when to heartlessness is united vanity and frivolity, then is his faith still further destroyed, and not only is the faith of the victim himself shaken, but that of his comrades also,

the on-lookers ; and the more chivalrous and honourable their sentiments, the more lasting and deep is the mistrust engendered."

" You seem very much in earnest," the lady might answer, " let me hope that you are speaking as an on-looker only."

" Yes, entirely from that point," returns he ; " my experience dates from a long residence in India, where all that is worthless in woman comes to the surface, and where goodness and rectitude are—well, I question if they so much as exist."

" Then have you quite lost faith in woman from the unworthiness of the few ?" inquires the lady.

" Say, rather of the many," rejoins he ; " the want of principle that I have seen exhibited by women in their dealings with men, and the pernicious effect that their gracelessness has produced upon them, has, I confess, left me with but little trust and very much of suspicion where women are concerned."

" How very sad," returns the lady, " that society should be so constituted out there."

" Sad, but true," asserts he, " but when women have no better occupations than dressing and flirting, whether in India or in England, how is it possible that they can become other than heartless and frivolous, if not altogether unprincipled and demoralized."

" I am afraid I cannot contradict you," returns the lady ; " there is too much truth in what you say,

although I believe that the class of women you depict are in the minority, and I trust it is reserved to some one to restore your faith in the majority."

"That would be difficult," responds he, "I would not say impossible, but I am afraid that were I beguiled for one moment into belief, my suspicions would be aroused the next, being aware as I am of the self-seeking propensities of woman."

"I will not argue the point with you now," says the lady, "but leave it to time or to fate to decide."

"Too many of us draw upon the future for everything," is the retort; "I have discovered that it is best to take the present as it stands, and to expect nothing from the future."

"That is a very morbid view to take of life," says the lady, "the future may have so much in store for you for all you know to the contrary."

"You are of a sanguine turn of mind, I see, like most ladies; but can you lay your hand upon your heart, and tell me, that the realization of the future at any time of your life surpassed, or even equalled, what 'the present' held for you at the moment when you were so eagerly looking forward; if so, you have been more fortunate than most people."

"Well, I cannot say that it has; and on looking back, one feels that one would gladly exchange the past for the present if one only could."

"Ah, the past, we all look back upon that; the

young man to his school-boy days, the middle-aged man to his college-days, and the old man to the days of his prime."

"The moments that are fleeting fast,
We heed not, but the past—the past,
More highly prize."

"To be content with the present," remarks the lady, "demands that one's 'lines should be cast in pleasant places,' otherwise, life would be unendurable without the sweetening thought of what the future may contain, and the being able to say,—

"Where art thou, beloved to-morrow?"

or of feeling with Micawber, that, perhaps, 'something will turn up.'"

"There it is," laughs he, "if Micawber had made the best of the present, and thought less of the future, and had put his shoulder to the wheel in earnest, poor credulous, confiding Mrs. Micawber would have had a better time of it. I have always looked upon her as the most amiable of wives."

"It is very amiable of you to allow as much," says the lady, "seeing what your opinion is respecting women in general."

"Mrs. M., you see," retorts he, "was not a woman of fashion, but a woman of fiction, and a worthy woman in her way."

At ~~out~~-door meetings, where usually two or more

ladies are sitting or walking together, it not unfrequently happens that the conversation with an acquaintance, who chances to join them, is almost entirely sustained by one lady only; the friend, or friends, who may be with her merely supporting her with an occasional word or smile; but when equal to doing more than this, the opening is always afforded them, though it would be idle and useless to attempt to draw into conversation one, who, when she did speak, would be certain to say the wrong thing; and it is worthy of remark that those who have the least to say, in the way of agreeable conversation, have an unfortunate facility for saying the wrong thing when they happen to speak, giving a good-natured friend no little trouble in adroitly covering up their *gaucheries*. The *rôle* of one who says something foolish every time she opens her mouth is decidedly that of a listener until she has learnt to fly alone, and made some advances in the art of sensible small talk.

When a second man joins a group consisting, perhaps, of two or three ladies and but one man, if unacquainted with the new-comer, the one who has had his talk with the ladies withdraws, leaving the coast clear for his successor, but if the new-comer were a friend of his, he would remain by the side of the ladies, and although he might not engross their attention entirely as before, he gets a very fair share of it, and a lady who can engage two men in con-

versation with her at one and the same time, providing that her beauty is not the chief attraction, is rather a clever young lady than not; but when a husband and wife are joined out walking by a friend or acquaintance, the conversation is then carried on by the two men, the lady seldom having a chance of distinguishing herself otherwise than as an intelligent listener; and even in the conversation *à trois*, when the lady is not related to either of the gentlemen, but a *bond fide* acquaintance only, unless she exerts herself to be agreeable, and keeps the thread of the conversation well in her own hands, only allowing each man to have just as much, or just as little, of the talk as she pleases, she finds that before a few moments have elapsed they have all the talk to themselves, and in which she cannot very well join, however inclined to do so, and when this occurs she feels prompted to say "good-bye" to them both, and leave them to each other's society, which departure would probably be taken with much equanimity; but when not wishing to relinquish a pleasant chat with acquaintances she gives a check to their running on in some such way as this:—The one man will say—

"How are you?" "When did you come down?" or, "When did you come up?" as the case might be. The other replies—

"I have only run up for a day or two, to look out for some horses;" or "I am only down here for two

or three days, staying with Brown, you remember him." The reply to the first remark would be, "If you are going to Tattersall's, I will come with you; I want to pick up something to match that roan of mine;" or to the second remark, the mention of Brown would elicit various scraps of information as to where Brown was, what Brown was doing, and as to Brown's stable arrangements, "what he had got to ride," and "what he had got to drive." But to prevent this line of conversation being taken, a woman of tact loses no time, and the "How do you do?" from her is followed with the identical remark that the male friend would put were the chance but his, with this difference, that the man puts it in an off-hand, careless manner, and the lady in a manner graceful and even insinuating; and all the information he has to give about himself and his movements, as to when he came up, or when he came down, and even about Brown, is imparted to her, his friend receiving the benefit of the intelligence, although perhaps getting no further than being able to put in, "Brown, oh, yes, I remember him, he was a very good fellow." Thus Brown might form a link of conversation for the three, the lady skilfully extracting from the two men all they had to say about him and his possessions, but never allowing them to talk over her head.

"Mr. Brown drives a very smart looking coach, a chestnut team, I think," throws out the lady.

"Yes, that is Brown's coach," returns Brown's guest, "I came over with him to-day, it is only a seven-mile drive; he expects a lot of fellows to stay with him to-morrow, he promises us some good sport, there are plenty of birds he says."

But at the words "birds," and good sport," the lady knows perfectly well that unless a diversion is made, the two men will coalesce and prove too much for her, so she breaks in with :

"Is there a Mrs. or a Miss Brown, or is it only a bachelor party?"

"Brown is a bachelor," returns Brown's friend, "but I doubt if he will be allowed to remain one with all his money."

"Perhaps he is of your opinion," says the lady, turning to the man who is *not* staying with Brown, "and holds ladies at arms' length, as you do."

"No, from what I can remember of Brown," returns he, "he was rather susceptible where ladies were concerned, I only wonder he has held out so long."

"That is because he has had it all his own way," says the other man; "if he had been a poor man, he would doubtless have been married long ago, a little opposition on the part of a prudent father or guardian being just the stimulus he wanted, whereas the mammas have rather gone on the opposite tack, and have never allowed him to forget that he is a coveted prize."

"I suppose you will look upon this as further confirmation of woman's pursuit of wealth," puts in the lady, addressing her other acquaintance number one, as he may be called by way of distinction, "and I was hoping that you might be led to take a more lenient view of the female character."

"Circumstances are against you, and I am afraid they ever will be," returns he; "you will tire of your benevolent intention when you find how hopeless is its accomplishment."

"Whatever task you have undertaken," gallantly puts in acquaintance number two, "I am quite sure you will carry it through in a most successful manner if it depends upon your persuasive powers, for whoever is the object of your pity or benevolence, must sooner or later give in to you and own your power."

"I am not over sanguine of success," returns the lady, "there is as much to be undone as to be done, and my progress will be almost imperceptible I am beginning to fear."

To which acquaintance number one can only reply :

"I own to feeling not a little flattered at the interest you are kind enough to take in me, but am also a little mistrustful of your motives, otherwise your anxiety to rehabilitate your sex in my eyes would be the first step in that direction."

"It is as I said, the charm is working," says acquaintance number two, "and I think I see the begin-

ning of the end ; but do not give away all your interest and sympathy to our friend here, as you seem to be doing, but reserve a little for my unworthy self."

" Certainly," returns the lady ; " what do you wish me to be sympathetic about or to take an interest in ? "

" In myself," generally is the rejoinder.

" That is too vague," returns the lady, " there would be nothing to dwell upon. Sympathy spread over so large a surface would exhaust itself, give me some point upon which to concentrate it."

" You have put him in a corner by such a request," remarks acquaintance number one, " he is asking for what he really does not want, like a schoolboy for more apples than he can eat. The things that most occupy him at this moment are, I fancy, whether his bay mare is lame or not, and whether he will get an extension of leave for the hunting season."

" You are rather hard upon me," returns acquaintance number two, good-humouredly, " you want to put me quite out of court. I suppose," turning to the lady, " while I am enjoying your society and your smiles, I am not a fit object for sympathy, but rather for envy, when I am deprived of this pleasure, and am no longer within reach of it, then will be the time for you to bestow your sympathy and compassion upon me."

" Then the time has now arrived," says the lady,

"sooner than either of us thought for. Mr. Brown's coach is in sight, and is coming this way."

"Brown is not alone," exclaims Brown's guest, "Smith, Jones, and Robinson are with him, three of the pleasantest fellows I know. I must not run on any longer; I am afraid I must say 'good-bye' for the present."

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